

転生したら

"I became the sword by transmigrating"

Story by Yuu Tanaka, Illustration by Lio

棚架ユウ イラスト／るろお

剣 でした



I Was a Sword When I Reincarnated

– Tensei Shitara Ken Deshita –

- Volume 6 -

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[CardboardTL]











*traitorAIZEN: At this point, the covers and illustration probably won't match how I split the volumes.
But it's better than nothing :)*

Chapter 228

Kanna Kamui

[I know I say this literally every single time we go anywhere at all, but Ulmutt was a pretty decent place.]

“Nn.”

“Woof.”

To us, the city had become a fairly important landmark. It was there that we met Rumina, who in turn helped Fran evolve through a method that you couldn't really call anything but miraculous. Us meeting Rumina was already one hell of a coincidence in and of itself. There were many fine details that led up to the encounter. There was a pretty good chance that we never would've met had the circumstances been even the slightest bit different.

Rumina was one of the first Black Catkin Fran had met since she lost her parents, but that wasn't all. To Fran, she'd effectively become a mother figure, one that'd shown an incredible amount of warmth and affection. The bond the two shared drove Fran, it made her want to work even harder to improve her clan's social standing. Rumina was the only reason Fran had finally shown her less mature side. She would've probably never acted in a manner befitting her age if not for the older Black Catkin.

One of Ulmutt's key attractions, the yearly Martial Arts Tournament, had taught us a lot about matchups, tactics, and even how we could best make use of our strengths. We reaffirmed that victory wasn't entirely based on what was written on one's stat page, and that we should never get too full of ourselves because there was always someone stronger than us. We both knew that there was simply no way we could beat either Forrund or Amanda in a battle to the death. We were too lacking in more or less every single aspect.

But that was fine.

It was precisely our recognition of that weakness of ours that drove us to reach even greater heights.

“Nn. Will participate next year too.”

[Sounds good. And next time, we’ll make sure we win first place.]

“Nn!”

“Woof!”

The time we spent in Ulmutt had also allowed us to build a connection with the Beast Lord and several other Beastkin. In doing so, we learned of a possible resolution to the problem of Blue and Black Catkin relations, and that the Blue Cat Tribe had effectively lost its standing.

There was hope that the Blue Cat Tribe could change going forward. We weren’t about to let the Beast Lord and Zefmate be the only two to handle the situation, we’d also put some thought into how we could potentially help them out. The best way we’d come up with so far seemed like it would be taking out any Blue Catkin slave traders we happened upon.

Last time, it took us about four days to move between Barbra and Ulmutt. We now knew the path, so I’d thought that heading back would’ve been a much faster process.

I’d been pretty much spot on at first, as we managed to cover about 70% of the distance in two days, but unfortunately, we ended up running into something we couldn’t really just overlook.

“O-Oh god, please help me!”

“Hiiiiiiiiiii!!”

“Rooooooarr!”

That is, we saw a swarm of lesser wyverns chasing a group of three men that looked to be merchants. In our eyes, lesser wyverns were actually quite weak, as we could take them down with ease, but to the merchants, the beasts were monstrous foes they’d never be able to overcome.

Seeing the wyverns caused me to recall the time I fought one to the death back when I was just transported over to the Marou Plains. The memory was by no means a good one, but for some odd reason, remembering it filled me with a sense of nostalgia

nonetheless. Unlike me, however, the merchants weren't pit up against just a single enemy. There were a whole 10 chasing after them.

"Urushi."

"Woof."

Urushi kicked off at top speed in response to Fran's command. It only took him a brief moment to reach the merchants.

"H-Hiiiiii!"

"Damn it! Why!? First flying lizards, and now even magic wolves!?"

"Shit! We're so dead!"

Our sudden appearance had caused the merchants to end up slowing down. The energy drained from their legs as they gave up on their lives.

"Not enemy."

"Huh? Wait, what? A kid?"

They didn't notice Fran, who'd been riding on Urushi's back, until after she called out to them.

"I-Is that wolf yours?"

"Wait! Aren't you the Black Lightning Princess!?"

"Nn."

The three merchants once again bumped up their speed. Learning Fran's identity had shown them a ray of hope. They seemed to be pretty lively, a trait I couldn't really say I disliked. After all, being lively was much better than breaking down and screaming nonstop.

"Need help?"

"Yes please!"

“Definitely!”

“T-Thanks!”

I doubted saving them would net us any rewards, but we decided to help regardless because ditching them would probably weigh on our consciences.

“Will take materials.”

“Sounds good!”

“We’ll even throw in a bit of an extra reward!”

“Though it probably won’t amount to anything much...!”

“Shut up, idiot!”

“If we die because she leaves, it’ll be all your fault!”

“You say that, but she’s a high ranked adventurer! What the hell are we supposed to do if we can’t pay her fee after she helps us?”

“W-Well... I guess you’re right. I can’t deny that I don’t have enough to pay a high ranking adventurer on hand...”

The merchants began to bicker as they ran for their lives, possibly because they felt relieved that they might yet be able to avoid their demise. A part of me suspected that they were trying to make us feel sorry for them, but I didn’t really mind either way.

We’d been willing to help them out for free, but I wasn’t about to turn down any sort of reward. If anything, it would be better for us to demand one. There was a good chance that we’d be swarmed by the masses if word got out that we were willing to help the weak for free.

My only problem with this whole setup was that I didn’t actually know what would’ve been considered fair payment, so I just told Fran to say something random that seemed to suit the situation.

“Will worry about reward later. Will ask for money equivalent to value of life.”

“Huh? Tha—”

“Move away, or will get hit.”

Fran and Urushi leapt at the lesser wyverns without really minding the merchants. They only managed to get out of the way in time because I buffed up their legs with a support spell.

“Hold o—”

“Wait u—!”

The merchants seemed to be panicking in response to Fran’s offer.

Thinking about it a bit led me to realize the implications our words had carried.

A C rank adventurer had basically told them to pay whatever they thought their lives were worth. They probably felt like we would end up spreading rumours about how cheap they were if they didn’t give us an amount that ended up satisfying us and that we’d basically put their reputations as merchants on the line. It would’ve been much better for us to just ask them to pay whatever the market price was.

Either way, I decided to shelve the thought and just focus on the lesser wyverns for the time being.

Though they were objectively on the weaker side, the wyverns were still wild magic beasts. They immediately realized that Fran and Urushi were threats, and as such, chose to surround the pair instead of chasing the merchants down.

They stopped moving after they arranged themselves in a circle, as if they’d realized that they would die regardless of whether they advanced or retreated.

“Master”

[What’s up?]

“Want to test.”

[What do you have in mind?]

“Kanna Kamui.”

[Hmmm... Yeah, I think I see where you’re coming from.]

We’d only ever applied the spell in confined spaces, namely Rumina’s dungeon and the tourney’s enclosed battleground. We’d never used it in a larger, more open environment.

There wasn’t any real reason for us not to try it out.

[Alright. I’ll get the spell ready. You make sure the merchants actually manage to evacuate.]

“Nn.”

Kanna Kamui was extremely difficult to control. I was actually able to make better use of the spell than Fran.

My Accelerated Thought, Parallel Processing, and Sorcerer skills rendered my Kanna Kamui able to cause twice as much destruction as her’s.

Moreover, using it would give her a pretty bad headache. Her first cast of the spell had even caused blood to start dripping from her nose. It was obvious that it heavily burdened its user’s brain. It was so bad, in fact, that I wanted to avoid letting Fran use it if possible. I couldn’t help but suspect that every single cast would just flat out reduce one’s lifespan.

I built up a bunch of magical energy as Fran and Urushi intimidated the Wyverns and prevented them from escaping.

[Everything’s ready on my end.]

“Nn. Merchants moved.”

[Kanna Kamui!]

A thick, white lightning bolt rained down upon the lesser wyverns the moment after I voiced the spell’s name. The open area around us served to demonstrate the full extent of its destructive power.

Low, rumbling roars followed the brilliant white flashes as they tore through our surroundings. It was almost like an angry God had descended upon the area for the sole sake of going on a violent rampage.

Both Fran and Urushi had already expected to be assaulted by a series of incredibly loud sounds, so they'd covered their ears in anticipation. The merchants, however, had not, so they ended up screaming and pressing their hands against them.

Crap. We'd told them to retreat, but it looked like they were still relatively nearby. It looked like we were going to have to heal them up a bit later on in hopes that they'd forgive us.

"Nn?"

"Woof?"

[Uh... It looks like I might've gone a bit overboard.]

I'd been expecting our thunderbolts to just leave the lesser wyverns charred, but it seemed that they ended up doing so much damage they caused them to just flat out evaporate.

The spell had created a 15 meter wide crater, and heavily damaged the forested area around it.

Everything within a 50 meter radius of the crater had been totally messed up by Kanna Kamui's impact. There were no longer any trees in our immediate vicinity. The ones that lay a bit closer to the 50 meter mark were still present, but they'd fallen over, and some were even still on fire.

[Yeah uhh... we should probably avoid using Kanna Kamui unless we have to.]

The spell would probably end up annihilating any companions we happened to have. In fact, I was pretty sure the merchants only still existed as of right now because we'd told them to retreat ahead of time.

They'd been sent rolling because of the shockwave, but, at least they were still alive, right?

[Well, so much for gathering materials and magic stones.]

“Wasted.”

“Woof.”

Urushi seemed rather disappointed that the attack had destroyed all the wyvern meat.

[Oh well, I guess that’s that.]

“Nn.”

Chapter 229

The Rumoured Black Lightning Princess

“Still okay?”

“...”

“...”

We turned over to the merchants after eliminating the lesser wyverns that’d been chasing them, but they weren’t capable of providing us any sort of immediate response. Instead, they simply trembled on the spot as they stared off into the distance.

They didn’t seem capable of averting their gazes from the destruction we’d just caused. Honestly, I couldn’t really blame them. I’d gone a bit too far.

“Uh... so...”

“It looks like... we made it...”

“So about that reward...”

The merchants’ faces paled. I couldn’t really blame them. What they just bore witness to was something prone to leaving the average person in a state of shock, and the price we named clearly hadn’t helped. There was a fair chance they’d interpreted our offer as a sort of threat instead.

“The three of us have about 50k Golde on us in total.”

At first, I thought that they had quite a decent bit of cash on hand, but then I realized that it was pretty much the norm given that they were merchants. Furthermore, their tones seemed to imply that they didn’t think it was nearly enough to pay for Fran’s services.

“Good enough.”

“Huh? Really? Are you sure?”

“Nn. Because caught in attack.”

We ended up using the fact that they’d ended up inside the surge of winds that followed Kanna Kamui as an excuse to lessen the cost despite the fact that we’d healed them afterwards.

“T-Thank you very much!”

“Y-You really saved us.”

“We would’ve died without your help.”

They were grateful even though we ended up taking all the cash they had on hand, which seemed to imply that the market price for our services was much higher than just that.

We parted with the merchants and headed on our way. We knew that they were heading in the same direction as us, so we ended up killing all the magic beasts we ran into along the way and clearing a path for them. That said, it was more so something we did just because we felt like it as opposed to something we chose to do in the spirit of service.

It didn’t take too long for us to experience a second interruption after dealing with the first, as we came across a group of people large enough to be considered a roadblock. The group seemed to have come from Barbra’s direction, and were heading in Ulmutt’s. I had a bit of a hard time identifying them, as they were a bit too organised-looking for adventurers, and too lightly equipped for knights.

Most of them seemed to be on edge, and some even had their weapons drawn.

Though I called them a roadblock, they weren’t actually in our way. We could easily just pass them by so long as that was what we wanted. I was fairly inclined to choose that exact option because I didn’t really want to get us involved in anything too troublesome.

“Take detour?”

[Nah, let’s not. They might end up misunderstanding our intentions if we do.]

The reason I said that was because they seemed to be able to see us. There was a chance they'd assume we chose to run away from them if we took a sudden turn. That said, I didn't really know the group's purpose, and there was a pretty good chance that they hadn't any good intentions.

[Make sure you're ready to fight at any given moment if need be.]

"Nn."

"Woof."

Urushi lifted off the gas and slowed down as he approached the group. Seeing him close in caused the group to immediately ready their weapons.

A few of the weapons that'd been drawn were bows, but fortunately, we didn't suffer any attacks regardless. As far as I could tell, their actions were driven by two separate reasons. The first was that they were able to sense that we weren't giving off any bloodlust. The second was that they'd managed to retain their composure despite being rather weak as individuals. Most of them were about as strong as the average E ranker. The man leading the group seemed a bit stronger than the rest of its members. He seemed like he was a D ranker, but only just barely made the cut.

Most of the group's members were focused on Urushi; many hadn't even noticed Fran. But again, I couldn't really blame them. A massive, hulking magic beast had basically just ran straight at them, after all.

Neither Fran nor I thought of Urushi as anything more than just a cute pet, but that didn't really go for anyone that didn't know him.

[Hey Fran, it'd probably be better for you to get off Urushi and walk for a bit.]

"Nn. Got it."

[As for you, Urushi, you should probably dive into her shadow.]

"Woof."

The act of Urushi shrinking himself down and entering Fran's shadow caused a few of the group's members to let out a few shouts of surprise. Fran didn't really pay their reaction much mind, as she kept moving towards them regardless.

I got myself ready to teleport us out at a moment's notice. My plan was to move us up into the sky so we could wipe them out with magic if they turned out to be hostile.

Fran started from about the 50 meter mark and approached at a rather brisk pace. The group wasn't able to react until she reached the five meter mark. Only then did the man that stood at the group's front finally call out to her.

"W-Who the hell are you!?"

"Nn?"

"What the hell was with that wolf just now? And why the hell didn't you greet us at all!?"

"Hi. Bye."

"Wait, wait! Hold on kid!"

I'd kinda been expecting to be able to just ignore the group and move on, but I wasn't really sure if that was the best course of action given that we had no idea as to who they were.

"How about fixing that attitude of yours? Don't you know that we're the Dimuyr Mercenaries?"

Oh god damn it. Are all mercenaries like this or something? Why did they think we'd know them?

The man immediately started throwing questions at Fran without pause. He asked who she was, where Urushi went, and if something had happened a bit further down the road.

He seemed to slowly grow more and more irritated over time because he didn't like Fran's attitude. His voice gradually got louder and louder as a result.

(Master, ideas?)

[Hmmm... It'd probably be best for us to just leave after ignoring him some more.]

Or so I thought. We couldn't actually put my plan into action because a second group,

the rear guard, caught up with the first right as we began to move. They clearly belonged to the same organisation and much to our annoyance, ended up in our way.

I began building up my magical energy as I watched the situation unfold.

“What the hell are you doing?”

“Nothing special pops, er, Division Leader. I’m just interrogating someone that seems suspicious.”

“Interrogating? Why the hell would you do that? We’re being paid to wipe out a group of lesser wyverns, not interrogate someone. Did you run into a scout for a band of thieves or something? “

It seemed that the person leading the rear guard had a higher position than the guy that’d first addressed us. He also seemed to be the first guy’s father seeing as how he’d called him pops.

“Well, no, but...”

“Then why the hell are you bothering!? Stop fooling around and wasting time!”

“O-Oh come on! Just give me a second! I was about to start intimidating her into spilling the beans, so I’ll get it done real quick!”

Well, well, well, what do we have here? He wanted to intimidate Fran? Did I hear that right? I guess that means we should beat the crap out of the guy that called out to us before using the rest of his mercenary band for target practice.

The division leader seemed to immediately catch onto the fact that Fran and I were itching for a fight.

He pushed his son and subordinates aside so he could get a better look at her. His face paled the moment he did. He immediately reacted by turning towards his son and smacking him in the face.

“Gaahh! W-What the hell was that for, pops!?”

“God damn it! You’re an idiot! I can’t believe you’re so goddamn stupid!”

“Rghghh! Arghghh!”

The boss guy hit his son over and over until the younger mercenary lost consciousness. None of the other mercenaries seemed to understand the cause of their leader’s sudden outburst, and as a result, ended up staring in surprise.

Likewise, we also ended up staring because we didn’t really get what was going on. My only guess was that he’d somehow mistaken Fran for some sort of influential noble.

“I-I’m terribly sorry! My subordinate was acting without the band’s permission, I swear that we had no intention of making an enemy out of you. Please forgive us.”

It seemed the division leader really had mistaken us for someone else, as he ended up kneeling and begging for us to spare him.

“What the hell are you lot doing!? Lower your heads and get on your knees right this instant! I’ll have anyone that disobeys fired on the spot!”

The order was a bit of a ridiculous one, but it contained within it a sense of authority that forced the mercenaries to obey.

“Again, I’m terribly sorry for my subordinates’ attitudes. Please, Black Lightning Princess, forgive their rudeness.”

It turned out that he hadn’t actually mistaken us for anyone else. He knew who Fran was and that messing with her would spell his end.

“W-Wait, that’s the rumoured Black Lightning Princess?”

“I heard she doesn’t show any mercy to anyone that shows her any hostility...”

“Yeah, and she even erases all the people that disobey her...”

The mercenaries began to gossip as they as they caught wind of Fran’s identity, but a single glare from their commander ended up silencing them.

“Nn. Can go now?”

“Of course!”

“Then leaving.”

“Have a safe trip!”

Surprisingly, the mercenary commander ended up giving us his blessings as he saw us off. They hadn't caused us any harm, so I didn't actually see any reason for us to retaliate. That said, I was really curious as to why they were *that* afraid of us. I really wanted to learn more about the rumours people were spreading about us.

The rest of our trip went rather smoothly, we reached Barbra without experiencing any further interruptions.

[Well, we're here. I guess we should go visit all our acquaintances and check in on Old Man Gallus.]

“Nn.”

Chapter 230

Back to Barbra

[Man, we're finally back in Barbra? It sure has been a while since we were last here.]

"Nn."

Only a month had passed since we left the city, and it honestly hadn't changed all that much while we were away. The only real difference was that most of the stuff that'd been busted up by the Evil Beings had been fixed. The city's current state made the whole thing feel like it wasn't such a big deal after all. That said, I still couldn't help but feel that we'd been away from it for quite some time.

[Let's start off by visiting everyone we know.]

"Nn."

The first place we visited was the Chef's Guild because it happened to be the closest. Unfortunately, the person we'd set out to visit, the old judge guy, was nowhere to be found.

We tried to leave the moment we learned that he wasn't there, but one of the receptionists stopped us before we did.

"Um, excuse me, but could I have a bit of your time?"

"Nn?"

"The truth is that both you and your master have qualified for a rank up, so I was just wondering if you wouldn't mind me giving you more up to date guild cards."

I didn't recall the fact that we were a part of the Chef's Guild until the receptionist reminded us. I'd totally forgotten that we had to sign up in order to participate in the cooking contest.

And that was exactly why I didn't understand why we were getting our chef rank's

raised. The only thing we did was participate in the contest, but they would've ranked us up before we left if that was why this was happening.

"Why?"

"The curry recipe that the two of you are responsible for has become incredibly popular. Curry's rate of growth is so explosive that it'll likely soon spread throughout the entire country."

I was rather pleased to hear the receptionist's words. Fran would probably end up rejoicing if curry got so popular she could buy it regardless of where she was.

"Your contribution to the development of both our country's economy and culture have earned you both the right to silver guild cards."

Fran pulled out both our cards and had them traded for a pair with silver borders that the guild had already prepared for us ahead of time.

The cards issued by the Chef's Guild were quite different from the ones the Adventurer's Guild issued in the sense that they weren't magically enchanted in any which way. Comparing the two was like comparing analog to digital.

"That card serves to demonstrate that you have our backing in all the business-related endeavors you pursue within the city."

"Nn. Got it."

We didn't really need their support, but hey, why not, right...?

"Please keep in mind that your rank can go down over time if you don't renew your card before it expires, or if you don't accomplish anything significant for an extended period of time."

I wasn't really all that interested before, but got sucked in when the receptionist told us we had to actively do stuff to keep our rank. We'd already raised it, so just letting it dropped seemed kinda wasteful.

(Master, what now?)

[Hmmm... I guess we should probably give them some sort of recipe.]

Their interest in curry seemed to indicate that they would probably appreciate us giving them any sort of exotic recipe. Hmmm...

[Got any ideas, Fran?]

Handing over one of Fran's favourites seemed like it was probably the best choice. I came from another world, so I doubted my taste palate was the best to go by.

(Nn... Katsudon?)

[Yeah, I guess that does sound like a pretty decent idea.]

Fried foods and recipes that made use of eggs were both few and far inbetween. Likewise, soy sauce was also really considered to be a bit of an unusual spice. The combination of the aforementioned three factors made katsudon an incredibly rare dish. I'd never seen anything that bore even the slightest resemblance to it here in Barbra.

And so, we ended up handing the guild a copy of my katsudon recipe. We made sure to record how one made the katsu part of katsudon, as well as any of the recipe's optional seasonings and finer details in order to make it easier for the recipe to spread.

Fran filled in all necessary documents and handed them over to the receptionist.

"Wow. This... is amazing. It looks like a genuine innovation and even describes how the recipe can be expanded upon. Should I file this recipe under both your name and your master's?"

"Nn. Please."

"Okay, feel free to consider this recipe accepted. We'll make it public soon. It looks really promising, so I expect it to spread the same way curry did."

"Really?"

"Of course. Your curry recipe has made you quite well known. I'm sure many chefs will ask for the recipe the moment they hear that you two are its progenitors, I don't doubt that it'll spread through Barbra like wildfire."

The katsudon recipe's prospects sounded pretty good. I hoped that one of Barbra's

chefs would end up being creative enough to combine our two dishes and create katsu-curry.

With that done and out of the way, we left the Chef's Guild. The receptionist saw us out with a big smile on her face the whole way through.

[Hmm... what now? That took quite a bit more time than I was expecting.]

"Orphanage?"

[That's not a bad idea. We might as well stop by and check it out.]

We knew that Amanda had done something, but we never did end up personally visiting the place after her intervention.

Fran, Urushi, and I all ended up stiffening up the moment we finally laid eyes on the orphanage. The change it'd undergone was just that incredible.

The exterior used to be all messed up; one could tell the place was in tatters from a glance. It'd since been repaired, but that wasn't all. The wall surrounding the orphanage had been repainted, and the garden now featured a massive flowerbed.

"Look, it's Urushi!"

"The adventurer girl is here!"

Fortunately, the children themselves hadn't actually changed. They were wearing better clothes, and no longer looked even the slightest bit shabby, but that was pretty much it. Well, that's Amanda for you, I guess.

It seemed that the orphans all still remembered Fran and Urushi, as they immediately gathered around her with smiles on their faces.

"Oh, hey Fran!"

"Io."

Io came out from the orphanage and greeted us upon noticing that the children were stirring up a fuss. I still remembered her both because she was kind to children and really good at cooking.

“Thank you so much for all you’ve done for us. The orphanage is finally in much better hands, and the children are smiling much more than they were before.”

The skilled chef bowed her head to us even though we didn’t really think we’d done much of anything at all. Amanda was the one that saved the orphanage, not us.

“Amanda told us that you were the only reason she knew that the orphanage was in trouble, and that you had asked her to help it.”

“Only did that. Nothing more.”

“Don’t be silly. There’s also the matter of the curry recipe you published. The children just love it. They can’t get enough of it even though I’ve started making it once a week.”

“The curry you make is really tasty, Ms. Io!”

“It’s super yummy!”

Io was already capable of making an incredibly delicious soup without access to anything more than vegetables of the lowest grade. I was really curious as to what she was now capable of making given that Amanda had provided her access to higher quality ingredients.

Apparently tomorrow was this week’s curry day. We ended up asking Io to make a bit extra for Fran and Urushi because I wanted to see her take on the dish.

“Bye. Will stop by tomorrow.”

“We’ll be waiting!”

“See ya!”

“Bye Urushi!”

I took a moment to consider what to do next. Checking out the Luciel Conglomerate seemed to be one of the few remaining choices. All our other acquaintances were adventurers, which in turn meant they were likely still in Ulmutt.

That, however, didn’t mean we were out of options.

[Alright, whaddya say we go looking for the old man?]

“Nn. Sounds good.”

Chapter 231

Regus, The Information Broker

We started walking around so we could look for Old Man Gallus.

I started thinking about who we needed to talk to in order to find him. The Adventurer's Guild was always an option given that adventurers were always on the lookout for skilled blacksmiths. There was a pretty good chance someone would know something about where he was.

Likewise, the Blacksmiths' Guild also seemed like a fairly decent choice. He probably would've stopped by at least fairly recently if he was still at work in Barbra.

[Let's head for the Adventurer's Guild first, I guess.]

"Got it."

To Fran, the Adventurer's Guild was more or less her home base. She'd met with Gamud, the guildmaster, in person before, and had even become rather famous because of how far she got in Ulmutt's tournament. There was simply no way the Adventurer's Guild would end up turning a request for information away for no reason. Speaking of which, the Adventurer's Guild's information network likely outshined the Blacksmiths' Guild's. There really wasn't any reason to choose the latter of our two options over the former. Given all that, we ended up turning our heels towards the Adventurer's Guild.

For some odd reason, both Fran and Urushi ended up fidgeting and restlessly casting their gazes all over as we moved along.

Their restlessness seemed to indicate that they were sensing something.

[Is something the matter?]

"Curry's scent."

I totally forgot that Barbra was in the midst of a curry boom until after Fran and Urushi

inadvertently reminded me of it. There were several street stalls in our vicinity. It only made sense for at least one of them to be serving the dish given its popularity.

Fran somehow managed to narrow down the exact stall in question and casually approached it. She did it so naturally it almost seemed instinctual.

A part of me couldn't help but suspect that she would probably fall for any traps that involved luring one's prey in with curry, even if we were in the midst of exploring a dungeon.

"Welcome!"

"This, what?"

"Aye, that'd be mah curry n'dles. We makes it based off curry."

I was pleasantly surprised that someone had already come up with the idea of using curry to create a noodle-based dish. It looked to me like their recipe involved putting the noodles and curry together in one big pot and then cooking it all at once. The result seemed pretty good appearance wise, but I figured the noodles would end up being overcooked and soggy. Still, I couldn't really claim that I was disinterested. The same seemed to go for Fran, as she bought two portions of the stuff, one for herself, and one for Urushi.

"Urushi, here."

"Woof!"

Both my companions immediately slurped down their entire bowls. They seemed perfectly content with the flavour.

[How was it?]

"Tasty."

"Woof woof!"

[Were the noodles not too soggy?]

"Nn."

It seemed that the chef had managed to come up with something to keep the noddles nice and firm. I asked Fran about it a bit later on, and we managed to conclude that the noodles were the kind that didn't really get soggy unless you left them for way too long. They probably contained something along the lines of konjac or cellophane.

The dish was interesting, and I was really impressed by the chef's ingenuity. He'd raised the bar; I was starting to expect a lot more out of other people's curry dishes.

Fran continued to visit stall after stall as she made her way over to the guild.

Barbra's Adventurer's Guild was lively; it contained an incredible number of adventurers.

A fair portion of them seemed to move their gazes in Fran's direction the moment she entered. They threw her glances, as if they weren't all that willing to stare. Their eyes seemed filled with doubt and suspicion, but she didn't mind them and instead just marched right over to the counter.

"Got question."

"Please feel free to ask away."

The receptionist's professionalism impressed me. She treated Fran courteously and politely despite not knowing her identity.

"Looking for someone."

"So you want to issue a search request? I can introduce you to an adventurer that specializes in that sort of field if you'd like. Would you mind negotiating with the person in question directly?"

I liked the receptionist's suggestion. The person in question could probably do a pretty damned good job if the guild considered them a contact reputable enough to recommend.

"Works. Can meet person soon?"

"Of course. He's right there, after all."

The receptionist directed her gaze towards a nearby adventurer, a middle-aged man

with a scout-type class. His combat-based stats were rather low, but that was only because he specialized in the gathering of information. He had a bunch of detection-based skills, stealth-based skills, and negotiation-based skills.

“Hey, I heard you’re looking for someone?”

“Nn.”

“I’m what a lot of people like calling a small fry because I pretty much only do jobs that don’t need me to leave the city. That said, I can make up for it because I know pretty much everything that goes on here in Barbra, so I should be able to point you in the right direction. Anyway, I probably rambled off a bit too long, why don’t we get down to business?”

Our newfound acquaintance introduced himself as Regus. He seemed to run his operations within the guild, as he had us sit down with him in one of its corners as he spoke. His attitude was an easygoing one, and he didn’t really seem to be looking down on Fran either, which was nice.

“So, who exactly were you looking for again?”

“Gallus. Blacksmith.”

“Oh? You’re looking for the ever so famous blacksmith, are you?”

“Know him? Want to know current whereabouts.”

Things were looking up. It seemed that we’d be able to find Old Man Gallus so long as we paid up.

“Will pay intel fee.”

“Don’t bother. I won’t be charging you.”

“Nn? Why?”

“Well, you see, the thing is I don’t really know all that much about where he is right now. I do have a bit of info for you, but it’s nothing substantial enough to warrant me charging you for it. Besides, networking with the Black Lightning Princess is worth way more to me than a bit of chump change.”

Regus' words demonstrated that he'd acted the way he did precisely because he knew who Fran was. I didn't really care either way, as we ended up getting the information we needed.

"The last I heard of him was about 10 days ago. He was still in Barbra, and I think he did some maintenance on the Guildmaster's weapon."

There wasn't any more information on him. Regus himself was of the opinion that Gallus had likely left the city.

"But didn't see in Ulmutt."

"Have you not been in touch at all?"

"Nn."

"Hmmm... I can think up several possibilities if that's the case."

The first possibility Regus brought up was that Gallus had gotten into some sort of trouble on his way over to Ulmutt. The old man could've been attacked by either magic beasts or thieves.

"But I doubt that to be it. The tourney's made it so the roads are more populated than usual. There's been more patrols checking the route too, so there probably would've been a few witness reports if that was what'd happened."

Gallus was decently proficient with both Hammer Arts and Fire Magic, so I doubted he'd be delayed by any sort of minor conflict.

The second possibility was that he'd been involved in an incident that took place within Barbra, one that happened before he managed to leave. He was an incredibly skilled blacksmith; there was a chance he'd been kidnapped by a slave merchant or criminal organisation that wanted to make use of his skills.

Though both the first and second possibilities insinuated he was in some sort of trouble, that in and of itself was an assumption that may or may not have been correct. Gallus could've just accepted a job that required him to remain off the radar. The old man had the tendency to only do things he wanted to, but that didn't mean he was actually safe from royals or other highly influential nobles. He could've been dragged off by one because they wanted him to do some top-secret task.

Furthermore, there was always the off chance that he'd simply forgotten to keep in touch because he got a bit too engrossed in his work. He had a true craftsmen's temperament, so that was always a possibility we had to consider.

There was simply no way for us to figure out exactly what had happened.

"Would you mind giving me a day to do some investigating?"

"Thanks. Any task for me?"

"I don't really think anything too showy would work to our benefit... Hmm... wait, you know Barbra's guildmaster, right?"

"Nn."

"Alright. It'd probably be best for you to see if you can get any information out of both the guildmaster and the Blacksmiths' guild. Don't worry about investigating and figuring out if they're trying to hide anything. Just talk to them as you normally would."

"Got it."

Alright, I guess that means we're visiting Gamud.

Chapter 232

The Rumours

Regus had told us quite a bit for free. That said, we were asking him to do a good bit of work, so we were naturally planning to reward him for any of the services he was going to provide going forward.

The price was set at 30k Golde regardless of what he managed to find. It was apparently a bit higher than the market price, but he promised to do his best to give us a decent bang for our buck. With that decided, we went our separate ways.

[Let's go talk to Gamud.]

"Nn."

The receptionist immediately sprang into action when we showed her our guild card and asked to see the guildmaster.

Her actions apparently weren't driven by our rank, but rather, because she'd recognized Fran as the Black Lightning Princess. It seemed information about her had already been disseminated to the guild's associates.

She ended up getting a secretary-like person to guide us up to the guild's second floor and into the guildmaster's room.

"Hey, long time no see. I heard you got quite a bit done in Ulmutt."

"Nn."

There, we found Gamud, the Barbra branch's guildmaster, and a former A ranked adventurer known as the Dragonfeller.

He'd fought alongside Forrund, Amanda, Colbert, and everyone else during the Evil Being incident. The sight of him using a warhammer the size of his body to send Rynford flying had left a pretty deep impression on me, possibly in part because he'd totally saved our asses back then.

“I probably would’ve spectated myself if I wasn’t stuck here cleaning up after the incident.”

“Can’t be helped.”

“Riiiiight? Man, I would’ve loved to see you take Fermus on. Those threads of his are one huge pain in the ass to deal with.”

Fermus and Gamud were both A ranked adventurers that’d made Barbra their home base, so they were probably more than just acquainted with one another. There was a pretty decent chance they’d worked together on at least one occasion some time in the past. Their nicknames were rather similar, so I suspected that they’d probably been a part of the same party.

Asking him prompted him to explain that my suspicions were on point. They’d both been a part of an incredibly famous A ranked party known as The Dragonslayers. Their names were so well known that they’d practically become the stuff of legends. Normally, I would’ve just wrote off the last bit he mentioned as a casual brag, but he was an A ranker, so I was actually kinda tempted to just take what he said at face value.

“So whaddya need? I’m pretty sure you didn’t stop by just ’cause you wanted to see me.”

Fortunately for us, Gamud wasn’t too interested in pleasantries, he cut straight to the point and asked us about our business. We responded in kind and told him we were looking for Gallus.

“I see. So you’re looking for Gallus...”

“Current location?”

“Sorry, but I dunno. All I know is that he ran a maint on one of my weapons ’bout 10 days ago, so he was still in Barbra at least till then.”

“I think he said something or another ’bout going to Ulmutt, but he never mentioned when he was leaving.”

“Okay.”

Gallus had apparently informed Gamud of his destination, but that was all the

guildmaster knew. I immediately jumped to the conclusion that we weren't going to get any more info out of him, so I told Fran that it was probably time to leave.

"Oh yeah, didja happen to really not like mercs or somethin?"

But the guildmaster stopped us by asking Fran a question right as she started to get out of her chair.

"Nn?"

"Well... it's just that I've been hearing some odd rumours."

"What kind?"

"Oh, y'know, just that the Black Lightning Princess hates mercenaries, that she kills all the mercs that antagonize her, that she'll crush any mercs she happens to hate, and that she'll start casting spells at any mercs she happens to see without warning."

Huh? Why the hell would anyone think that?

"At least that's what I've been hearing from all the mercs that make this town their base. They're scared shitless of you."

Did he just straight up ask all the mercs he knew whether or not they thought we hated them or something?

"No relation to mercenaries."

"Oh, that so?"

"Just, will crush all enemies."

"A-Ah... I getcha."

"Nn."

Thinking back, I realized that we'd gotten ourselves involved with and viciously attacked a pretty large number of mercenaries. In fact, the first group to fuck with us, the adventurers we met in Alessa, had been a group of ex-mercs.

There was also that run in we had with Blue Pride back in Ulmutt. It was technically the Beast Lord that took them out, but that probably wasn't how it seemed to the average onlooker. Most people probably would've suspected that Fran had done something.

That explained why the Dimuyr guys we met on our way to Barbra were so terrified of us.

To them, Fran was overwhelmingly powerful. She was more than capable of wiping them out in an instant. That alone would've been perfectly fine, but combining it with the supposed fact that she hated mercenaries made it so it was only natural for them to be terrified of her.

"You mind if I relay that bit of info to the mercs?"

"Do it."

"Oh yeah, I've also got a request I'd like you to complete. "

"Request?"

"You're the perfect person for it seeing as how you can go head to head 'gainst an A ranker."

It sounded like he wanted to us to do something along the lines of taking out a powerful magic beast. I didn't see any problem with taking on a request, but I really didn't want to do anything that'd take up too much of our time.

Luckily for us, that wasn't really what he'd had in mind in the first place.

"Y'see, there's these guys I just so happen to have my eyes on. I'd like you to spar with them and show them that there's always someone stronger out there."

"Can't do yourself?"

"Forrund and I have been looking after them since they were just kids, so they think it's only natural for them to lose if they've gotta fight me or 'im. We've beat them up so many times that it doesn't make 'em feel frustrated anymore."

Gamud's argument made sense to me. People kinda expected to lose against their

masters and whatnot.

“You mind handling it tomorrow morning? It shouldn’t take too long.”

“Don’t mind.”

“Hell yeah. I’ll wrangle the brats in so you can do your thing. They’re older than you, but i’m sure you can give ’em a good smack and make ’em learn some modesty. Gahahaha!”

“Nn.”

Fran worked out the details of when and where with Gamud before finally making her way back out the Adventurers’ Guild’s front door.

Chapter 233

The Dragon's Table

[I guess our next destination is probably going to be the Blacksmiths' Guild.]

"Nn."

We made sure to ask for its location before actually leaving the Adventurer's Guild, so we knew exactly where we were going. Our destination was fairly close to the port. It seemed to be built there in order to facilitate easy access to the ore and coal that'd often get shipped in via the sea.

Though the Blacksmith's Guild was supposed to be our next destination, we still did plan to make a stop on our way.

[Okay, let's go find ourselves a place to buy some booze.]

"Nn. Liquor store?"

[Yeah, either that or a bar that lets you straight up buy whatever.]

Gamud told us that it'd probably be best for us to bring a gift or two after we told him of our next destination. Many of the Blacksmiths' Guild's members, its guildmaster included, were dwarves, which meant they would appreciate a good drink or two.

Hearing that tempted me to look for some really high quality booze, the kind that would knock their socks right off.

[Here's to hoping we come accross a decent bar on our way over.]

"Fermus' store?"

[Right. I do remember The Dragon's Table being somewhere in that direction now that you mention it.]

There seemed like there was a decent chance we'd be able to get some booze from The Dragon's Table. The place was a restaurant, so it was sure to have some. Moreover, the owner had personally given Fran a coupon. I figured that alone would almost guarantee the staff there at least hearing us out.

And so, we decided to stop by Fermus' store.

"Urushi, shadow."

"Woooooof?"

[Sorry, but no. The place isn't really big enough for you, and I'm not even sure they allow pets to begin with.]

"Whimper..."

I really didn't think we would be able to bring Urushi in with us. To that end, I figured that it'd probably be best for us to feed him stuff he likes a bit later on in order to cheer him up.

"Welcome. Would you happen to be looking for a table for one?"

"Nn."

"This way please."

"Thanks."

"Unfortunately, the owner is currently out, so we won't be able to provide our usual selections."

The menu the waitress handed us only had five different items listed on it. It was a sharp cut down from the 30 or so I remember seeing last time we visited.

Fermus' apprentice was temporarily filling the former A ranker's shoes because he was currently out of town. It seemed that the Dragon Hunter had only permitted him to create the five dishes currently listed because he didn't believe the rest of his apprentice's stuff was of a high enough quality to serve to his customers.

The restaurant's renowned Dragon Bone Soup was still being sold, but apparently it

was something that'd been prepared by Fermus ahead of time.

"Then want everything."

"Huh? Did you just say everything?"

"Nn. Everything."

"Are you really sure you'd like everything? Our servings are quite large."

"Not problem. Already ate before."

"O-Okay. In that case, I'll have everything coming right up."

"Thanks."

Fran handed the coupon we'd gotten from Fermus to the waitress. For some odd reason, she seemed extremely shocked; her eyes had snapped wide open.

"D-Did you maybe..."

"Got from Fermus."

"So it really is a VIP coupon, a token indicating that we'll have to treat you with utmost care!? I knew it!"

The waitress' declaration caused her feelings of surprise to make their way over in my direction. I hadn't thought of the thing Fermus had given us as anything more than just another coupon for discounts or something.

"O-O-Oh geez! What do I do!? The owner's out. The only person here capable of making food is an idiot whose skills don't even come close to matching the owner's! Oh no, oh no, oh no! I can't let the customer down, else risk the owner scolding me later on!"

She went full blown panic mode, and even started to insult Fermus' apprentice. I kind of pitied her and as a result, didn't really want to take advantage of her given the current situation, but I couldn't help myself. She'd basically handed us an opportunity on a silver platter.

"Special treatment, no need."

“There’s no way I could just treat you as I would any other customer, especially when the food we have now isn’t as good as it could be!”

“Then want alcohol. Best in store.”

“Alcohol? Consider it done! Please just give me one moment to get it!”

Though she ran off and grabbed us the booze we wanted, she seemed to have totally forgotten about the fact that we’d also ordered food. Normally, that would be something that’d totally piss a customer off, which in our case meant tattling to Fermus. That said, I decided to reserve our judgement until after she returned. There wasn’t really any reason for us to get mad so long as she brought out something of a decently high quality.

It took about five minutes for the waitress to finally make her way back over to us. She didn’t seem to be letting the fact that she was clearly out of breath bother her, as she immediately presented an expensive looking wooden box the moment she returned.

“This wine is the finest we have. It comes from a region known throughout Kranzel as one of its finest producers of alcoholic beverages. This bottle in particular has been magically preserved for about 120 years, so it’s some of the best stuff you could possibly get!”

The receptionist ended up bringing us something way beyond my expectations.

“To be honest, it isn’t something that we would normally be willing to serve our customers...”

“Source?”

“I borrowed one of the bottles that the owner keeps in his personal collection of rare wines.”

It sounded like taking the wine would probably anger Fermus. I was totally fine with him getting angry at the waitress, but I really didn’t want him directing his rage in our direction. Given that, we convinced the waitress to return Fermus’ prized collectable to its usual spot and have her give us the best stuff they actually had for sale.

We ended up getting five bottles of a type of booze that cost us 1k Golde a pop. The price seemed just about right for something we were going to use as a gift for someone

we'd never met before.

"Are you sure you're fine with just that? The owner's got a much better selection down in his wine cellar."

"Good enough. More important, hungry."

"Ohhhh nooo! I-I-I'm so sorry I forgot! I'll have your food prepared immediately!"

It seemed the waitress finally realized that she'd forgotten to take Fran's order this whole time. She ended up bending her waist forwards and bowing with all the force of a thousand prostrations before running off to the kitchen in order to report the order.

[Is it just me, or do you think we stressed her out a bit too much?]

"Nn."

The waitress had seemed so be panicking so hard that she even worried Fran. Admittedly, I couldn't really think of it as a bad thing because we'd managed to get a good couple bottles of booze out of the ordeal, and for a decently cheap price at that.

Fran burned straight through everything she was given, and even ended up ordering a bit of tea so she could relax after having eaten. The chef took that as a sign and paid us a visit as Fran leisurely enjoyed her post-meal break.

"H-How was the meal?"

"Not good as Fermus."

"I-I see... Could you point out the parts that bothered you?"

He took out a notepad and immediately started to write stuff in it. The waitress had labeled him as an idiot, but to me, he felt more like someone that was obsessed with cooking than anything else. [1]

I considered telling Fran to be a bit less direct, but ended up deciding otherwise because telling it to him straight was more likely to benefit him.

Fran ended up being the one giving out pointers because I myself hadn't eaten. That

said, it wasn't like Fran's advice was lacking in any which way. She would happily eat basically anything because that was what the time she'd spent as a slave had trained her to do, but that didn't mean she wasn't capable of judging how good something tasted.

The only real difference was that her scale was a bit skewed. If a normal person were to rate something on a scale from one to five, the labels they'd use would probably be: bad, kinda bad, not bad, good, and very good. Fran's labels, on the other hand, would probably read something more along the lines of: inedible, not bad, good, very good, great.

Fran's cooking skill was flat out maxed out, and as a result, her tastebuds were incredibly sensitive. She used this sensitivity of hers to describe the chef's deficiencies in detail.

She spent a long time giving her critique; the sun had started to set by the time we finally left.

Good luck apprentice dude. Live strong, don't give up!

Chapter 234

The Blacksmiths' Guild

We arrived at the Blacksmiths' Guild about 20 minutes after leaving The Dragon's Table

Gamud had only told us its general location, but honestly, that was all we needed to locate it because it stood out from all the other buildings in its vicinity. It looked kinda of like a massive workshop. Smoke actively billowed out its chimney. The plot of land the building sat on was huge and all the people entering and leaving it were stern-looking men.

Though there was basically no way it wasn't the Blacksmiths' Guild, a part of me hoped I was wrong. I really wanted to know what else it could've possibly been.

I tried imagining all the different possibilities, but my train of thought was cut short as we approached. I happened to see a crest with a pair of crossed hammers on it mounted on the building's door plate, which clearly denoted that the place was indeed the Blacksmiths' Guild we'd been looking for.

A wave of pressure hit me the moment we entered the building. The foyer's ceiling was incredibly low. It was almost like the place had been constructed specifically to intimidate those that entered it. I felt like I'd entered a workplace meant solely for hardboiled men.

"Hmm? You have some business here?"

The Blacksmiths' Guild's receptionist was nothing like the type we'd typically had back at the Adventurers' Guild. The buff dwarf that worked at the desk didn't bother smiling. He instead spoke in a low voice and threw Fran a sharp glare, almost as if to threaten her.

"Looking for person."

"Then you've come to the wrong place. Go talk to the Adventurers' Guild instead."

His cold response almost made him seem like a bartender that'd just rejected someone asking for milk.

"Looking for blacksmith. Gallus."

"I don't know who you're talking about. You satisfied yet, girly?"

"No. Need more informed person. Here, gift."

"Oh?"

The receptionist's tone changed the moment he laid hands on the booze we'd brought. Welp, that's a dwarf for you.

"That's a mighty fi-tsk."

He began reaching towards the bottle of wine Fran had placed atop the counter, but she took it away right before he reached it. The act caused the dwarf to glare at her in a begrudging manner, but she didn't mind him, and instead just chucked it back into her Dimensional Storage.

"Get person. Close to Gallus or know location."

"...Wait here a bit."

The dwarven receptionist left his desk and headed deeper inside the building. It took him about 10 minutes to finally return to his desk.

"Follow me."

"Nn."

It seemed that he'd found just the guy, as he finally began leading us through the guild. We ended up going underground and passing through a series of large doors only to end up finding ourselves inside a rather small room. Despite its size, it managed to come off as a luxurious office that clearly belonged to someone important given how gaudy the furniture was. However, it was dark. No direct light managed to reach any of the room's four corners. The room's owner was only capable of operating within it because he was a dwarf.

“I’ve brought her over, boss.”

“Good work.”

Apparently, we’d been brought straight to the guild’s top dog even though we hadn’t told the receptionist who we were. I couldn’t pinpoint the exact reason he ended up doing so, but I felt that it was likely either because we’d mentioned Gallus, shown him the booze we’d brought with us, or a combination of both.

Regardless, we ended up giving him a bottle of wine as he left.

“You sure?”

“Still have more.”

“Great. I’ll be happy to take it off your hands then.”

Surprisingly, the receptionist ended up flashing us a big smile. I knew that he was a dwarf and all, but god damn!

“Is that wine I see?”

“Nn. Gift.”

“I guess that means I’ll have to take this seriously, not that I wouldn’t have to begin with. I’d rather not risk incurring the Black Lightning Princess’ wrath, after all.”

It turned out that the Blacksmiths’ Guild’s boss had already heard of Fran. He’d never actually met Fran and only knew that the Black Lightning Princess was a female Black Catkin, but he still managed to pinpoint the fact that she was the person that everyone was talking about. I wasn’t really surprised. It wasn’t really that difficult to deduce Fran’s identity.

There were two main reasons figuring out who Fran was had become such a simple task. The first and foremost was because she had become a hot topic as of late. Barbra’s people were already aware that she was in town, so they’d started to actively talk about her. The second was that Fran was strong. There weren’t many strong Black Catkin, and a single good look at her was more than enough for any skilled individual to figure out that she was a cut above the rest. Putting two and two together immediately allowed one to conclude that Fran was indeed the rumoured Black

Lightning Princess.

We promptly asked the Blacksmiths' Guild's boss for Gallus' location, to which he responded by making a bit of a murky expression. His reaction didn't seem quite positive, but it at least served to evidence that he knew who Gallus was.

"Does your name happen to be Fran?"

"Didn't know?"

"Nope. The only thing we knew you by was your alias."

"Nn. Named Fran."

"Then, am I right in assuming you used to be called the Magic Sword Girl?"

"Nn."

I was a bit confused as to why he bothered confirming Fran's old name and nickname.

"I see... To be honest, not even I know exactly where Gallus has gone."

(Master?)

[He's telling the truth.]

Not even the Blacksmiths' Guild's boss knew where we could find Gallus.

"I do at least have a bit of information. I don't mind telling you, but only if you swear not to tell a soul. It's highly confidential."

"Nn. Won't tell."

"Good. Last I heard, Gallus had taken on a top secret request from a noble."

"Top secret request?"

"Not even I know exactly what it entails. All I know was that it was something an influential noble personally asked him to do, and that he was against it. That's it."

It looked like not even Gallus was capable of turning down important nobles. If he did, the noble in question would probably end up causing trouble both for him and the Blacksmiths' Guild as a whole.

"Basically means abducted?"

"He definitely was being forced to do something against his will, but it isn't really as bad as you're making it out to be. They at least put in an official request."

"Oh."

The Blacksmiths' Guild's boss wasn't lying, which meant the reason we hadn't been able to find Gallus was because he got forced into doing something he couldn't tell anyone about.

"Truth is, he actually left you a letter, told me to give it to Fran, the Magic Sword Girl. I'd actually made a few arrangements so you'd be brought straight to me if you ever showed up, but..."

Fran's new nickname, the Black Lightning Princess, had become much more widespread than her last. Gallus himself never suspected that she'd suddenly gain a new alias, and naturally, didn't know what that new alias could've been, so his letter was still addressed to the Magic Sword Girl. The old name had just flat out poofed; it'd gone so quickly that I almost missed it; hearing it again filled me with a sense of nostalgia.

"Here it is. I haven't looked at it myself, so I've no idea what he's written."

"Nn."

It seemed that he was once again telling the truth.

"Oh yeah, do me a favour and don't read it here. I'd be put in a bad spot if it makes mention of the request he's gotten from the state. I'd rather not get any more involved in than I already am."

Apparently, even just carrying the letter was already something the Blacksmiths' Guild's boss considered rather risky.

"Okay."

And so, we took the letter, handed over the booze we brought, and went on our way.

We had no way of knowing the letter's contents, so we ended up deciding that it'd be best for us to find a place without anyone around before actually opening it up.

[We're going to have spend the night in town, so we might as well just rent a room somewhere and read it there.]

"Nn. Got it."

Fran and I ended up deciding on a place right by the Adventurer's Guild seeing as how we were going to have to head over to it the next day anyways.

"Nn. Nice room."

[Goes to show you get what you pay for.]

The room was priced at 15k a night, mostly because we'd picked the best room with a bath we could find.

Though Fran herself had said that she'd be fine with a cheap room, I insisted otherwise, admittedly mostly for vanity's sake. Fran had gotten a really awesome nickname. I really wanted to let her act in a manner that befitted it.

Chapter 235

Gallus' Whereabouts

We got ready to open Gallus' letter after we settled down.

[Alrighty, let's give it a look.]

"Nn."

[Wait, don't be so rough with it. Try opening it with a bit more care.]

Fran ripped the letter open and undid the seal to reveal the piece of paper within.

It clearly had Gallus' signature on it, but the writing seemed kinda messy. It was almost like he'd rushed to finish writing the letter.

The letter started off by describing his predicament. It said that an important noble had ordered him to complete a request with utmost secrecy, hence why he wasn't able to contact us through any other means. It then continued on as follows.

I can't tell you exactly where I've gone. All I can really say is that I'll probably be somewhere in the capital by the time you read this letter. I won't be able to see you for the time being, but I'd like for us to meet up once the royal auction starts. They sell all sorts of equipment there. I'm sure they'll have something that catches your eye, so I encourage you to come. Oh, and I'm planning to make you a new sheath, one I hope will be to your liking. I'll be waiting for you in the capital.

Gallus.

So he's in the capital? That sure does sound pretty convenient seeing as how we were planning to head over eventually anyways.

[Welp, so much for finding him Barbra.]

"Nn. More reasons to go to capital now."

[Yeah. True that.]



We headed to the Adventurers' Guild the next day. Our goal was of course to trade notes with Regus. We'd already gained a rough understanding of where Gallus currently was, but we were still hoping he could provide a bit more info.

"Kept waiting?"

"Nah, I also only just got here. I've got a good few bits of info for you."

Alrighty. Here's to hoping it isn't redundant.

"I got us a room upstairs. We should probably head over before I tell you any more."

"Got it."

Regus' proposal was promising, as it more or less implied that the info he had for us couldn't be said within the public's earshot. To that end, we moved upstairs and sat ourselves accross from him.

"Silence."

"You really live up to your reputation, Black Lightning Princess. Your wind magic seems to be top notch."

Fran used silence to prevent any sound from leaking into our surroundings so we could speak without having to worry about being overheard.

"I'm going to be honest, I couldn't pinpoint Gallus' location."

"Nn. Can't be helped."

He then went on to describe what we already knew. That is, he told us Gallus had accepted a request from someone associated with the government, and that he'd left Barbra in secret.

"Based on your reaction, I'd say you probably knew all that already. I guess that means I'll have to move on to something you probably don't know."

“Nn.”

“The person that contacted Gallus was apparently working under Marquis Ashtonah. I can’t say for sure whether the Ashtonah’s issued the request at the country’s request or if they just decided to issue it themselves, but I’m more inclined to say its the former.”

“Ashtonah? Heard of somewhere.”

[That’s the household Celldio was from.]

(Godblade wanting noble?)

[That’s the one.]

The Ashtonah household’s employee had attempted to act in absolute secrecy, but he wasn’t able to slip through Regus’ information network unnoticed. His identity was evidenced both by the small accessory he wore with the family’s crest embedded in it and his use of one of the Ashtonah household’s villas.

Of course, the person that’d gotten in touch with Gallus wasn’t the only individual Regus had taken note of. Many of the marquis’ retainers had entered the city immediately after the Rynford incident. They tried sneaking around, but ended up standing out as a result.

“Oh yeah, take this next bit with a grain of salt. The source I got it from isn’t too reliable, but apparently, a carriage departed from the Ashtonah villa the very same day Gallus was rumoured to have left the city.”

“Rode carriage?”

“Most likely, yeah.”

I couldn’t help but have a fairly bad impression of the Ashtonahs. First, they ordered their son to search for Godblades, and now, they’ve even taken Gallus.

“Gallus unharmed?”

“He should be fine from what I hear. They’re after his skills, so they’re more inclined to treat him well than the opposite.”

Regus had a pretty solid point. They couldn't really hurt him or put him in too bad a mood unless they didn't mind lowering the efficiency of his work. Likewise, they couldn't brainwash him because there was a chance he'd forget a lot of the things that made him as skilled as he was.

They couldn't really threaten him either, because that wouldn't necessarily lead to him listening to them. The Ashtonahs needed to provide optimal conditions if they wanted him to do what they considered a perfect job.

"More importantly, Gallus is considered the Kingdom of Kranzel's Honourary Blacksmith. That's a title only the king can give, which means he's been recognized by the royal family. Anyone that forces him into anything will probably be tried for treason."

"Silencing him, possible?"

"I doubt it. Gallus is important, so important in fact that the state would probably launch an all out investigation if he goes missing for too long. You can never know whether or not you can hide something you've done for good, even if you think you've perfectly covered up all your tracks. It's just not a risk worth the Marquis' time, especially seeing as how he'd lose everything the moment anyone figures out what he did."

I saw Regus' point, but in my eyes, nobles had the tendency to be stupid enough to take risks like that.

"You don't need to worry. Gallus is said to be the closest thing you'll ever find to a god-tier blacksmith. His services are worth a ridiculous amount. They won't do anything that'll cause them to risk losing him."

Again, Regus had a point. It seemed that we'd gotten the wrong idea, and that there'd been no reason for us to think that he'd been forcibly dragged off. Thinking about it, while Gallus' letter had made it seem like he'd been forced into something he hadn't wanted, it didn't make it seem like he'd been subjected to any sort of violence.

Him telling us to meet him at the auction could've just been interpreted as him just not knowing where he'd actually be until then. He basically was telling us that we'd be able to get in touch with him there. That was all it was.

"That's all I know about Gallus, but I do have a bit more information for you.

Specifically, it's about Marquis Ashtonah and his household."

"Explain?"

"Apparently one of his subordinates caused some sort of incident. As a result, his secondary residence, which lies here in Barbra, will soon be subject to a government inspection."

It seemed that the whole Celldio incident really had caused the country to start suspecting the Marquis. Did that mean that the request they issued Gallus was in some way connected to the incident?

There was no way for us to discern whether or not that was actually the case because we lacked too much information to do so.

"He also dispatched a group of knights to the Marou Plains, but they weren't able to reach it. Only a few made it back, most were wiped out in the Forest of Exhaustion."

"Marou plains? Forest of Exhaustion? Why?"

"Sorry, but I wasn't able to dig *that* deep. I do, however, know that he hired a group of adventurers to try investigating the exact same area after his knights failed him."

It seemed that the Marquis was really fixated on the idea of having the Marou Plains scoped out. The plains housed B ranked magic beasts, so I had a hard time believing that he actually found anyone capable of doing the job.

"The adventurers that accepted his request were rather low ranked, so they weren't able to bring about the results he wanted."

Apparently the Marquis didn't want the whole thing to blow up, so they didn't make it out to be a big deal or ask for a designated request.

"And I think that's everything I managed to find. Sorry, I couldn't get you any big reveals."

"Valuable intel."

He'd not only verified that Gallus was safe, but also told us quite a bit about the Ashtonah family's affairs. We definitely got a good bit of value out of his services.

We paid Regus the 30k Golde we owed him and bid our farewells.

[Well, so much for locating Old Man Gallus.]

“Nn...”

[Though, he said he’d get in touch if we went to the auction, so I guess we might as well just wait till it happens.]

“Got it.”

Alright. Time to go fulfill Gamud’s request, I guess.

Chapter 236

The Spar Request

[It looks like it's time to do the thing Gamud asked us to do. Why don't we head on over?]

"Nn."

[So we're going to be fighting some young adventurers...?]

"Ready to do best."

[I uh... am pretty sure that isn't what he wanted you to do.]

"Nn?"

If anything, we should be more focused on holding back just enough. There was a good chance Fran would destroy the adventurers' hopes and dreams if she beat them too badly. I knew that Gamud thought well of the group and all, but I highly doubted they were Fran's match, especially since the nature of his request seemed like it was to beat them down. Still, I doubted they would be *that* weak. There wouldn't be any reason for Gamud to ask Fran in particular to spar with them if they wouldn't at least be able to put up a fight.

Then again, that might not be the case. Gamud had never proven himself not to be the type of educator that'd throw a chick off a cliff and tell it to fly, just to help it develop a sense of height. Either way, there wasn't much of a point in sitting around and brooding. We'd be able to figure it out when we saw them.

With that in mind, we left the room Regus had grabbed and headed back downstairs. I figured there probably wouldn't be any issue with us just skipping straight over to the guildmaster's room, but I felt like that violated the Adventurers' Guild's pipeline. To that end, I had Fran report in by speaking with one of the guild's many receptionists.

"Gamud here?"

Though, she kinda ended up skipping the whole reporting part given that she just straight up asked for Gamud.

“Good morning Fran. We’ve been awaiting your arrival. Please follow me.”

The lady that’d responded to Fran’s query led us not to Gamud’s office, but instead to a different room in the back. The room in question seemed like an armoury, as it was crammed full with all sorts of equipment.

Awaiting us in said room was the guildmaster, all suited up and ready to go.

“I’m glad you made it!”

“Nn. Why armoured? Joining in spar?”

Fran’s voice was clearly filled with anticipation. Unfortunately for her though, he ended up denying her query by shaking his head in rejection.

“Nah. I’m just going to act as the ref. The armour I’m wearing is supposed to be a contingency, y’know, just in case I happen to get hit. I won’t be taking part at all myself.”

“Oh.”

At first, Fran reacted with disappointment, but she soon recalled that she’d be going up against a group of adventurers so she managed give a motivated nod.

“Mmph.”

[Don’t smash them too hard, okay?]

“Nn. Will do best.”

Uhh... that’s not what I meant...

Fran squeezed down on both her hands in order to express just how motivated she was. It became clear to me that I could no longer do anything for the adventurers she was about to fight but pray for them to have more fortune in their next lives.

“Are you ready?”

“Anytime.”

“Then let’s go. I’m pretty sure the brats are currently using our facilities for training’s sake.”

Gamud led us to an indoor training ground with a diameter of about 30 meters. Its walls looked pretty thick. You probably wouldn’t be able to damage anything outside the room from within unless you really wanted to.

“Gather round, brats!”

“What’s good?”

“Good morning!”

“Sup.”

“Heya!”

I’d only been expecting two or three people, but there turned out to be nine. Their personalities varied greatly. The participants included everything from lazy-looking hoodlums to the super uptight kind that had their backs straight with enthusiasm.

Appraising them allowed me to find out that they were much stronger than I’d been initially expecting. The strongest two were D rank worthy. One was a level 27 Phantom Swordsman, and the other, a level 26 Flame mage. The rest averaged in at about level 22. Even the weakest, a scout, had managed to make it all the way up to level 20.

“Today’s training is going to be sparring.”

The adventurers immediately began to talk amongst themselves the moment Gamud filled them in on what was going on. It seemed the reason for this was more so because they just happened to be a group that liked to chat as opposed to anything else.

“Again?”

“Can we fight Forrund instead? I’d like that more.”

“Yeah, I know right? Mr. Gamud’s pretty bad at holding back.”

“Oh god dammit! Shut up!”

Gamud’s shouted immediately brought silence back to the training ground.

“Alright. Why don’t you introduce yourself?”

“Nn. Fran.”

Every single one of the adventurers’ gazes shot to Fran as she introduced herself before shifting over to one of the group’s shielders.

I didn’t understand why they’d bothered until after I appraised him.

Only then did I learn that he, Red, had access to level 7 Appraisal. In other words, they’d looked at him because they themselves weren’t capable of gauging Fran’s strength. They had to rely on him to fill them in because they were still too green to guesstimate her skill level at a glance.

Unfortunately for them, it was in vain. Fran’s real stats were covered up and hidden away. He wouldn’t be able to pick up anything more than just the random bullshit we decided fill her stat card out with.

Red ended up shrugging his shoulders and making an expression that almost made it seem like he was making fun of Fran. The gesture seemed to be an expression of the fact that the spar they would soon engage in wasn’t anything worth noting.

His message led his peers to relax. If I were to guess, I’d say that they probably assumed that they had to fight Fran because she was going to join them.

“She’s going to be taking all of you guys on today.”

“...Are you sure?”

One of the group’s members responded to Gamud in a questioning tone.

“I am. No need to hold back. Be as rough as you’d like. Are you ready, Fran?”

“Nn.”

Gamud’s words led everyone in the group save for the really serious-looking one to

start grinning. They appeared to have assumed that Gamud's instructions had been directed at them and not Fran. Chances were, they were thinking that Gamud wanted them to beat Fran up a bit in order to show her that she still had a ways to go.

"Gawts it."

I had to say, Gamud was a bit of a dick. He'd purposefully made his words easy to misunderstand so that it'd be easier for Fran to shatter their pride.

That said, I did have to admit that most of the adventurers Gamud had gathered were indeed fairly talented. They were only as stuck up as they deserved to be. Still, having Fran kick them down a notch was to their benefit.

"First up'll be Dewfo."

"You seriously want me to go first?"

"What, did you not want to?"

"Well, I wouldn't say that..."

The first person Gamud had ordered to fight was the highest leveled one, the Phantom Swordsman.

Fran glanced at the guildmaster to double check his intentions, to which he replied with a smile and a wink. Seeing him bat an eyelash filled me with a sense of revulsion, but I still managed to get the message. He wanted us to immediately blow the group right off their feet.

[Don't go too hard on him, you hear?]

(Nn. Won't make unfixable with Greater Heal.)

[Oh god damn it! That's not what I meant!]

Personally, I'd been a bit more on the Middle Heal side of things myself. But unfortunately for Dewfo, Fran had already drawn me and happily started walking towards the battleground's center.

Chapter 237

The Sparring Begins

Dewfo, the young but decently leveled Phantom Swordsman, slowly dragged his feet towards the arena. His face relayed an obvious sense of discontent. One could easily tell that he felt that this whole thing was just a waste of time. He didn't understand why he, the strongest of the bunch, had to waste his time fighting a weak little girl.

The guildmaster disregarded his emotions and instead positioned himself between Fran and Dewfo as would any other referee.

"Oh and you're going to have to spar Fran at least twice."

"Maybe if she lasts that long."

"Well, how about we just say it depends on how well you guys can handle her?"

Dewfo's only response was to lightly shrug his shoulders.

"I've already got someone to heal anyone that gets hurt, so hurry up and start."

"Fine, fine. I get it."

The person Gamud had called in was honestly one I could only possibly describe as someone's aunt. She basically looked like the average middle aged villager. Like, seriously. She was even wearing the overly plain clothes you'd normally expect a villager to have. She pretty much embodied the concept of "Villager A."

Despite that, she was still a capable healer. Appraising her allowed me to realize that there was a stark difference between her appearance and her capabilities. She was quite strong. In fact, she was stronger than all the adventurers Gamud had asked us to fight.

My eyes were immediately drawn to her level 3 Recovery Magic skill, a clear indication that she was even capable of using Greater Heal.

“Hi, I’m Beth. I used to be a B ranked adventurer, but then retired and got married, so I’m just a housewife now.”

“You say that, but you do still take on the odd request every once in a while.”

“Only ’cause their rewards catch your eye, no doubt.”

“Well, I do have to work hard for those rewards, you know? They really help with our household finances, since my husband’s income isn’t what you’d call the highest. Ahahaha”

A part of me almost wanted to say that the woman’s appearance served as the perfect disguise with which she could camouflage her abilities.

Fran caught onto the fact that she would be able to inflict a good bit of damage without having to worry too much. Her eyes had almost began gleaming as a result.

“Take your places and bow as per the routine.”[1]

“Dewfo.”

“Fran.”

“And begin!”

Both fighters took their stances and raised their weapons as Gamud began the match.

Neither budged as they stared each other down. It was as if both fighters wanted to let the other take make the first move. Their actions were the same, but their reasons completely different. Fran had started off by observing her opponent and deducing the extent of his strength. The conclusion she derived was that Dewfo was much weaker than her and that the battle would end the moment she engaged. Hence, she was allowing him to make the first move.

Dewfo, on the other hand, had placed his trust in the result of Red’s appraisal. He was allowing Fran the first move because he thought she was much weaker than him. His stat page made him look experienced enough to be able to gauge the strength of an opponent that lay right before his eyes, but he wasn’t able to judge Fran regardless. It seemed that his judgement was being clouded because he never so much as even considered the possibility that the young black catkin girl he was facing off against

was stronger than him.

Seeing him made me once again affirm that getting and maintaining the wrong impression of one's opponent was a fatal flaw.

"What? Something wrong? Are you not going to attack?"

"Okay to?"

Fran's question was directed towards Gamud, but Dewfo answered because he'd interpreted otherwise.

"It's normally good manners to let the weaker person seize the initiative at times like these."

His words almost made me break out into laughter.

"Nn?"

[Nah, it's nothing.]

"Okay."

"The hell are you mumbling around for? Hurry up and come at me so we can get this over with. I need to get back to work, and I don't have all day."

"But letting weaker attack?"

"Huh?"

"Weaker first. You first."

Fran's words ended up provoking Dewfo even though she did nothing but state the truth. They pierced right through him and delivered a blow to his pride.

"The hell, brat? You trying to put on airs or something?"

"Put on airs? Is what?"

"It means getting all full of yourself, you damned brat! It's clear that you're doing

exactly that, seeing as how you're claiming you're stronger than me!"

"But obvious truth."

"Why you little..."

It seemed to me that Dewfo was a bit immature. He started acting like a brat the moment he saw Red dismiss Fran's abilities. Thinking about it though, it did make sense. Dewfo was older than Fran, but he was still only 22 years old. He was still technically on the much younger side.

Gamud and Forrund had trained up his abilities, so he was a lot stronger than most of the other adventurers his age, but he probably hadn't really seen the world or faced any sort of real crisis. He was still lacking the experiences he needed to really grow up.

That was likely one of the reasons for which Gamud had asked Fran to knock him down a notch in the first place.

"Oi, hurry it up and just attack her already."

"Right? Arguing with her isn't any less disgraceful than not letting her make the first move, so hurry it up!"

"Just show the girl her place already, damn it!"

All the other adventurers began urging Dewfo on. None of them seemed to think that the strongest amongst them would end up losing in personal combat, at least not to Fran.

"Shut the hell up! Why wouldn't I rescind the first move to someone weaker than me!?"

Despite that, he refused to budge. He simply wouldn't initiate.

[Well, it doesn't look like he'll move until we do, so we might as well just attack.]

(Nn. Got it.)

Fran brandished me and made a declaration before finally initiating.

"Will attack now. Defend."

“Haah? Let me guess, the one thing you’re good at is bluffing.”

“Now.”

“Argh!?”

As his guard was down, Dewfo wasn’t able to respond to Fran’s attack at all. One moment, she was standing across from him, the next, she was right up in his face. He hadn’t been able to perceive that she had attacked him, but the sharp pain that shot through his leg and forced his knees to buckle informed him that he’d taken a hit.

“Graaaagghhhh!”

[Hmmm... Do you think that might’ve been a bit too much for a first strike?]

Fran’s charge had been a rather slow one. She had purposefully held back in order to make Dewfo take her seriously, but things didn’t seem work out the way she intended.

(Hope others take seriously now.)

[Yeah, true. They probably will.]

We’d basically made an example out of Dewfo and used him to inform the other adventurers that they’d end up getting totally smashed unless they took Fran seriously.

(Also rematch.)

[Right. He’ll probably take you more seriously next time he has to fight you.]

“Rashid, you’re next.”

“Huh? Huuuh!?”

“Hurry it up!”

“Y-Yessir!”

Gamud shouted and egged the next sacrifice up onto the stage. The person in question was one of the guys that’d been insulting Dewfo just a few moments prior.

“Named Fran.”

“I-I’m Rashid. W-Wait! Hold on a second!”

Rashid had yet to fully process exactly what’d just happened, but Gamud clearly didn’t care, as he immediately signaled for the next match to start.

“Begin!”

“Nn.”

“Gyaaaahh!”

Rashid was forced to retire nearly as quickly as Leopaldon. His right arm was blown off the moment he raised his spear and pointed it in Fran’s direction.

Only then did the adventurers truly register that Fran wasn’t just some random girl. And so, they once again began to tense up as their companion’s screams filled the arena.

[1] This is how they do martial arts spars. The two fighters will face each other and more often than not introduce themselves before beginning. In some MA stuff, you say your school(style), etc, during this part of the match.

Chapter 238

A Scolding From Gamud

“Next, Naria.”

“Huah!?”

The third person Gamud picked was the female archer that had joined Rashid in making fun of Dewfo. We used the time she spent approaching to glance over at the man we’d defeated in a matter of moments.

“Oh my, what a beautiful looking cut.”

“God damn, that hurts.”

“Come on, stop struggling. Get a grip already. Aren’t you supposed to be a man?”

“Gyaaaah! Stop hitting me damn it...!”

“And now you’re just exaggerating. Geez.”

The impression I got from the villager auntie made me feel like she was the type to tell the adventurers that their wounds would heal so long as they just spat on them or something, but that wasn’t actually the case. She was doing her job properly and fixing them up with Greater Heal.

Rashid’s arm was honestly a pretty terrible sight. Blood was flowing out of it nonstop. The villager auntie, however, remained unphased. She simply did her job and treated the wound with a smile. Her actions truly served to evidence that, despite her appearance, she really did have the heart of a former B ranked adventurer.

Naria turned her head towards Red, as if to ask him to verify the results of his appraisal, to which he responded by shaking his head from left to right. His expression demonstrated clear surprise. He simply didn’t understand why Fran’s abilities differ so greatly from what was written on her stat page.

“Named Fran.”

“Uhm...”

“Her name’s Naria. Begin!”

“Wait! Shit!”

Despite being confused, Naria managed to leap backwards the moment the match began. It seemed that witnessing Fran demolish both Dewfo and Rashid had been enough to at least push her to action. She raised her bow and attempted to aim it in the Black Lightning Princess’ direction, but her attack was flat out rejected before it could even be unleashed.

The distance between the two fighters had already been completely erased.

“Dammit! She’s so fast! Gyaah!”

Naria, like Rashid, lost in an instant. She too lost her right arm in a single, momentary engagement.

Next up was a larger man that went by the name Miguel. Unlike his colleagues, he was wearing a rather earnest expression. He was probably the first of the bunch to really take fighting Fran seriously.

He too gazed at Red for verification, but, the appraiser was no longer capable of providing anything more than just a pale-faced nod.

“The name’s Miguel.”

“Nn. Fran.”

“And begin!”

“Haaah!”

Though Miguel came at Fran more seriously than the rest of his buddies, his attack still seemed to be lacking in sincerity. He had clearly recognized that Fran had something that prevented Red from seeing her real stats, but he must’ve still held back because he judged Fran based on the way she looked. To that end, his attack almost

seemed to be lacking in power.

It seemed to me that giving both Red and Miguel a good shock was probably what we needed to do to get rid of the adventurers' hesitation.

"Nn!"

"Impossible!"

To that end, Fran raised me and challenged the blow Miguel had delivered with his greatsword head on. She locked blades with her opponent and held me in place without budging regardless of how hard he pushed.

She began pushing back after a brief pause, sending him flying through the air. He wasn't able to resist her. All he could do was get knocked on his ass.

Neither Miguel nor Red could believe their eyes. They hadn't thought that it'd be possible for her to block the attack head on, let alone overpower Miguel and push him back given the stats that showed up on her page.

Of course, that wasn't all. There was still much more to come.

"Stun bolt."

"Guaah!"

"That's impossible!"

Seeing Fran cast Lightning Magic caused Red to let loose a surprised shout. The skill didn't show up on Fran's stat page, so, as far as he knew, there was no way it was possible for her to cast it.

"Hah!"

"Garrgghh..."

Fran kicked Miguel; she smashed her leg into his face and sent his paralyzed body tumbling several meters back.

And that was that. Miguel stopped moving altogether. He didn't even twitch. Red,

however, rose to his feet. He was stunned, but still managed to squeeze out a question out of his now-dry throat.

“How...?”

“What’s the matter, Red?”

Gamud’s response came in much clearer a tone than Red’s. The situation seemed to have developed the exact way he’d wanted it to.

“T-Tell me, Mr. Gamud. Just who the hell is this brat!?”

“I’m not sure how you want me to answer.”

“M-My Appraisal skill looks like it’s acting up. It’s telling me that her level’s low, that she can’t use magic, and that she’s got no strength at all. How the hell is she that strong!?”

Seeing Red express his confusion caused Gamud to break out into a grin.

“So you don’t know who she is?”

“Why would I!?”

“She’s a Black Catkin girl that can cast lightning magic, and one that’s strong enough to instantly beat down Dewfo, Rashid, Naria, and Miguel. Do you really have no idea who she is? What about the rest of you? You got any clues at all?”

“...”

Silence.

The only response Gamud got was silence. He’d given them a pretty big hint, so I’d been expecting at least one of them to guess that Fran was the Black Lightning Princess, but it never happened. None of them were capable of answering his question at all.

Realizing that led Gamud to heave a heavy sigh.

“Haah... This is why you guys are still stuck where you are.”

“..”

“You guys started getting cocky the moment you amassed even the slightest bit of strength. You never gather intelligence anymore, and just leave your success up to fate or chance. You rely too much on Appraisal, you don’t have the ability to judge just how strong someone is without it. And worst of all, you can’t even get yourselves ready for battle even when there’s a clear starting signal.”

Gamud immediately began pointing out the flaws shared by the adventurers he’d taken under his wing. The whole reason that he’d bothered with having us join him today was so he could leave a dent in the group’s pride, so one could say that it was this precise moment that served as the whole session’s climax.

He reintroduced Fran to the adventurers, whose silent expressions betrayed nothing but a sort of awkward displeasure.

“Fran is better known by the nickname, The Black Lightning Princess. She’s a C ranker that participated in this year’s tourney and won herself a spot on the podium by taking down several A rankers.”

Though Fran’s nickname failed to ring any bells, the group appeared rather surprised nonetheless. The reason for this seemed to be that they knew just how difficult getting onto the podium was.

“And yes, I’m talking about the exact tournament that you all got kicked from a few years ago. I know for a fact that not a single one of you even made it past the preliminaries.”

“Ehhh!?”

“You have to be kidding me!”

“Right, I do remember hearing a few rumours about something like that happening.”

“Yeah, but isn’t she a Black Catkin?”

“I can’t believe the lot of you. You would’ve been able to recognize her immediately if you just gathered intel by talking to a few local merchants.”

The exasperated tone in which Gamud complained led the adventurers to hang their

heads in shame. They knew that he was right. They'd gotten themselves totally wrecked because they hadn't bothered keeping up to date on recent events.

"And again, don't rely on Appraisal. Some skills will allow people to either disguise their stats or totally deny the Appraisal skill its functionality altogether."

"Fine..."

"Never forget, the world is vast. There's always someone stronger than you somewhere out there. If you're not on..."

Gamud continued to ramble on and on. He didn't stop until the healer lady started to yawn out of sheer boredom.

Personally, I'd found his lecture fairly useful. Most of the stuff he said was obvious, but even the most obvious facts were often overlooked unless they were put into words and clearly expressed. Their current situation wasn't one that we were unlikely to ever find ourselves in, after all.

The battles we fought in Ulmutt's arena had taught us caution. The lecture covered similar topics, but more so seemed to be centered around the basics of adventuring.

"Whew. Sorry for making you wait."

"Nn. Fine."

"I've covered most of what I wanted to cover, but could you keep sparring with them? They could use the experience, especially against someone as strong as you."

"No problem."

Fran fearlessly grinned.

The adventurers she was pit against had lost the ability to laugh and jeer the way they had when they were first introduced to her. Their expressions had instead been warped in fear. To them, it must've seemed like they'd been thrown right into the jaws of a beast.

Chapter 239

Three Versus One

We decided to continue sparring with the adventurers Gamud took under his wing after he finished lecturing them.

However, that didn't go too well. Their moods had hit rock bottom not only because they'd just been scolded, but also because they'd realized that they were no match for Fran.

They weren't able to draw out the full extent of their abilities as a result, so she ended up totally crushing them with one hit each even though she was holding back. It took less than five minutes for her to go through a full cycle.

"You guys are pathetic... Is that really all you've got?"

"Kuh..."

"We're... terribly... sorry!"

Gamud spoke a line to provoke the adventurers into taking action, but they didn't take the bait. Instead, they simply responded with a series of despondent frowns and grimaces.

They knew that they were far too lacking in both strength and experience to beat Fran. That, combined with the fact that she was just a kid, had caused their confidence levels to hit rock bottom.

We'd been hired because Gamud had wanted us to knock the group down a few pegs. Unfortunately, he seemed to have overestimated them, as they'd ended up totally breaking down instead.

Fran threw a quick glance in the guildmaster's direction, as if to ask whether or not there was any point in continuing. We obviously didn't want to overstress Gamud's disciples. There was a chance that pushing them harder would lead to them either retiring or completely losing all motivation to improve whatsoever.

“Stop?”

She quietly whispered the question to him, as if to prevent anyone else from hearing it.

“Nah, keep going. The only ones that’ll break from what you’re doing now are the lost causes that never would’ve made it too far to begin with. They would’ve either ended up retiring after some sort of slip up or losing their lives in the field.”

Techniques can be honed, and skills can be learned. Dispositions, however, are innate. To be frank, Adventuring isn’t the type of career that anyone could pick up and just do. Some people will be better suited to it than others, and that’s that.

It was much better to realize that during a training session than out in the field where one’s life was at stake. And it was for that reason that I couldn’t help but think of Gamud’s methods as kind. The adventurers he’d taken under his wing were fairly talented. It was only a matter of time before they’d set out for a dungeon or haunt. It’d be far too late for an adventurer to find out that they’d made the wrong career choice in the midst of an expedition.

“Let’s get on with the second round. Dewfo, Naria, Miguel, you’re up.”

“...Fine.”

“Oh no...”

“Sure...”

Dewfo and Miguel assented reluctantly as Naria squealed in terror.

“This next battle will be a 3v1. I take it you have no complaints?”

“Nn.”

Though her opponents seemed full of complaints, Fran herself seemed all for it as evidenced by the clear way she’d nodded in response.

“Oh, and how about this? We’ll ban Fran from retaliating for a good bit. All you guys need to do for it to count as your win is hit her once.”

I wasn't too happy about Gamud deciding the rules without consulting us, but I ended up dismissing the thought because it'd only ended up serving to pump Fran up all the more. The restrictions seemed to appeal to Fran's more childish side, as they made the spar almost seem more like a sort of game.

Likewise, the adventurers had finally started to show a bit of drive. The three seemed to think that they would be able to land a solid, damaging hit on Fran under the current circumstances, and thus, the three of them engaged in a quick meeting to discuss their plan of attack.

"It looks like you're ready. Good. Begin!"

"Oryaaah!"

The first to attack was Miguel. He charged Fran and attacked with a swing of his greatsword. We immediately realized that the strike was a decoy given its unrefined nature.

Surely enough, Dewfo ended up closing in on us from behind as Miguel closed the gap. Honestly, he wasn't too bad at sneaking around, but it wasn't enough to deceive us. Naria launched an arrow at us right before Dewfo attacked, almost as if to cover for the holes in Miguel's assault.

Her shot was precise, and really served to prove that she was actually quite skilled with the bow. It flew under Miguel's armpit and by his face as he unleashed his strike. Honestly, it was an impressive sneak attack that would've caught any less skilled opponent off guard.

Dewfo's attack was timed in such a way that it arrived at about the exact same time as Naria's arrow. They were working together quite seamlessly, as one would expect from a group whose members partied up on a regular basis.

The Phantom Swordsman's blade seemed to have a sort of skill applied to it, as it seemed to distort in the same way distant objects would on a hot summer day. It seemed that the skill's purpose was to make it more difficult to figure out the precise manner in which his sword was being manipulated, which in turn meant that it gave him a bit of an edge in close quarters combat.

Though Fran's three opponents had coordinated quite well, their attacks had failed to land or even surprise her. The Black Lightning Princess was both capable of detecting

presences and detecting movement in the air around her. Thus, she caught the arrow with her bare hands and perfectly dodged both incoming blades. She then leapt out of their newly formed encirclement with ease, an act that caused all three of her foes' faces to twist in frustration.

To be fair, I couldn't really blame them. Fran had dodged their perfectly planned and seemingly unavoidable attack with a brilliant display of agility. The surprise they felt was only natural.

Still, they continued to attack. They kept trying to hit Fran with combos until Gamud finally gave her permission to retaliate, at which point in time she knocked all three out with a series of kicks. Her victory was accompanied by a wave of silence. None of the adventurers that we'd yet to face managed to respond. They all seemed to feel that they wouldn't be able to so much as scratch her regardless of what they did. That, however, didn't mean that they gave up. The spars still happened. Our second 3v1 went pretty much the same way as the first, but the third ended up being a bit more interesting.

Our opponents ended up being Wanda, the flame mage whose level just barely fell short of Dewfo's, Red, the shielder with appraisal, and Liddick, a spear user. Their demeanors were quite different from one another's. Red looked like he'd totally started panicking, Wanda seemed surprisingly confident, whereas Liddick seemed to be going into this whole thing with a serious, professional attitude. To me, he seemed like the most earnest of the nine fledgelings Gamud had taken under his wing.

One of the things that struck me as the most curious was the source of Wanda's confidence. She hadn't been all that motivated as far as the 1v1 went, so I figured it was probably because she assumed that she, as a mage, would be able to shine much more brightly in a group. Thinking about it, I could kinda see where she was coming from. Though Fran had demonstrated her ability to avoid physical strikes with ease, she hadn't really shown off any of the countermeasures she had for spells.

Her two party members were clearly of the same opinion, as they focused their strategies around leading Fran around in such a way that she'd be easier for Wanda to aim at. Fran noticed, but she took the bait anyways. She moved right into Wanda's line of fire.

"Flare Blast!"

She went all out. The spell she casted was one with enough power to critically injure a C ranker. It could even produce injuries too severe for Greater Heal to fully restore. The nasty grin that decorated her face demonstrated that it was an intentional choice. The attack wasn't as powerful as it was because she had accidentally forgotten to hold back out of desperation, but rather, one she'd launched in order to pay Fran back for all the frustration she'd caused her. It looked like she still needed a bit of discipline and refinement as far as her personality went, but that wasn't something we bothered concerning ourselves with. Educating her was Gamud's job, not ours. All we'd been hired to do was smash what was left of her pride to bits.

"Flare Blast."

Fran shot off the exact same spell. Her flames collided with Wanda's and resulted in an explosion that perfectly neutralized both attacks.

"That's impossible! Flare Blast!"

"Flare Blast."

"How...!? Fire Javelin!"

"Fire Javelin."

"How!? Why!? What!? That's impossible!"

Two magical attacks perfectly cancelling each other out wasn't something that could be considered normal under any circumstance, even if the two in question happened to be instances of the exact same spell. You needed to angle the attacks so they hit each other just the right way while also having a short enough chant speed and enough precise control over one's mana to match the original attack's power before it actually hit. In other words, it was an advanced trick that would typically be considered impractical.

Of course, Fran was hella strong and all that, but any other decently skilled mage would've been able to pull off the exact same feat. The problem lay with Wanda herself. Her chants were long, and she completely failed to hide any traces of her magical energies. The only skill she really had was flame magic. In other words, she was suffering because she relied too much on being a backliner. She was far too used to fighting in an environment crafted for her by her allies.

Wanda ended up falling onto her knees the moment she realized just how far ahead of her Fran really was. She'd completely lost the will to fight.

And so, before long, Fran ended up kicking the third group through the air. We'd assumed that our 12th match would also serve as our last, but Gamud had other ideas in store. He wanted us to take on all nine of his disciples at once. He clearly wanted to make sure we thoroughly broke their spirits.

Fran didn't have any reason to refuse, so she ended up going along with it. The rules were the same as they'd been for the 3v1. Fran wasn't allowed to attack right off the bat, and it would be considered her loss so long as she was hit even just once.

They didn't end up managing to match her. She led them around for about 10 minutes before finally showing them a glimpse of what she could really do by wiping them all out in one go.

Specifically, she'd ended them with a fire spell with a large area of effect. Gamud had ended up getting hit too, but he almost seemed to enjoy it as he would a cool breeze. We'd purposefully held back, so it didn't really do that much damage. In fact, I was pretty sure that even the nine we were up against could've withstood it so long as they just grit their teeth and endured instead of screaming and letting themselves get blown away.

Chapter 240

The Sparring Ends

“Those were some pretty decent matches. Thanks.”

“Nn.”

“That should fix their attitude problems. Now all I have to do is hope they can pull themselves together.”

Gamud heaved a heavy sigh as he looked over the nine adventurers we’d just knocked out. Honestly, their skills weren’t all that bad. They’d probably be able to grow much stronger so long as they gained a bit more mental fortitude.

“And these idiots thought they’d be good enough to make their way all the way to a haunt’s deepest depths. Can you believe it?”

“Haunt? Crystal Cage?”

“That’s the one. You been there before?”

“Nn. Went to midsection.”

“So even you only went that far?”

The place Fran was referring to as the Crystal Cage was the one place we’d gone in search of meat for the cooking contest’s sake. It was also the place in which we first saw Forrund. I still remember it quite well because we witnessed him totally wreck a thunderbird, a B ranked magic beast. Admittedly, the only reason I still remembered seeing him do that was because it’d freaked me out a bit.

“Want to go to depths? Not midsection?”

“Yeah. Anyone can visit the midsection whenever, but you aren’t supposed to go there or into any of the even deeper areas without getting permission first. There isn’t anyone keeping watch, so the rule isn’t enforced, but it’s still important. I mean, it was

only made in the first place 'cause it was supposed to protect people and keep 'em away. Most of the people who break the rule end up dead."

The Crystal Cage was a bit of a weird place in the sense that there was a pretty big disparity in the ranks of the magic beasts you could find there. It only made sense for the guild to tell adventurers to stay the hell out of places they weren't strong enough to be in.

"The risk isn't the only thing that goes up as you head deeper into the haunt. The rewards you reap do too. That's why people tend to break the rule and go deeper than they should."

Successfully defeating the magic beasts within the haunt's deeper parts would net good rewards. Likewise, going deeper would also increase your chances of finding rare materials and herbs.

"Apparently, these brats have successfully hunted magic beasts in the midsection a couple times already."

That sounded right to me. They did seem just about strong enough to pull it off.

"They were lucky enough not to run into anything particularly nasty, so they managed to get out safe and sound. It's why they started going on and on about wanting permission to visit the depths. The depths are a bit different 'cause they're blocked off by a magic barrier. You can't enter or leave unless you're given permission ahead of time."

"Oh."

"The reason they want to go to the depths is 'cause there's a place you can mine some pretty decent ores around there. They want to make use of them so they can get themselves some new equipment."

"Don't want to fight?"

"Yeah. They seem to be confident they'll be fine so long as they run away from everything that attacks them."

Gamud's disciples were cocky, but they understood that there was no way they'd be able to defeat a B ranked magic beast. That said, I wasn't all that sure they'd be able to

get away from one either. The thunderbird we saw was really fast. I felt that there was a chance even we would have trouble getting away from one unless we teleported around. There was also a good chance they'd be intercepted by other magic beasts as they ran. Letting them go was effectively the same thing as letting them march to their deaths.

That was probably precisely why Gamud had asked us to shatter their pride. He wanted to stop them before they did something *really* stupid.

"Thunderbird. Can't run."

"They probably wouldn't be able to get away from a flock of storm eagles either."

"Also darkness wolves. Like Urushi."

"Oh yeah, that reminds me. You had a darkness wolf for a familiar, didn't you? Whatever happened to it?"

"Sleeping in shadow."

Urushi didn't show any interest in the spars because he knew he wouldn't be able to participate. As a result, he ended up sleeping in Fran's shadow all morning.

"Right... Actually, that gives me a bit of an idea..."



Gamud had his nine disciplines line up side by side after they regained consciousness.

"Well? You finally understand how weak you all are now?"

They turned their gazes downwards in response to the guildmaster's question. It didn't seem like they'd been too willing to accept their own deficiencies. Rather, they'd instead painted Fran as some sort of incredibly talented genius and came to the conclusion that it was only natural for her to be better than them. In other words, Gamud had failed to achieve his goal, an issue that he himself had also come to realize.

"...Alright, we're going to be doing just one more spar."

"Ugh..."

“Again...?”

“Oh come on! Give me a break already!”

“Shut yer traps and listen goddamit! This last battle’ll be different from all the others. Fran, if you could.”

“Nn. Urushi, out.”

“Woof!”

Urushi rose out of Fran’s shadow before going from his dog-like form to his usual larger one. It was quite the intimidating act to watch.

“This is Urushi, Fran’s familiar. He’s a C ranked darkness wolf, the kind you’re prone to running into around the Crystal Cage’s midsection.”

Gamud’s words amounted to nothing but total dog shit. The only part of it that was true was that darkness wolves were C ranked threats. Urushi, however, was different. He not only had a unique skill, but had also gotten a lot stronger because he’d trained with us. It honestly wouldn’t be a stretch to say he was pretty much on the verge of being a B ranked threat instead. He was much stronger than any of the magic beasts one would find in the Crystal Cage’s midsection.

Red, however, didn’t know that. Hence, he ended up informing his comrades that Gamud was indeed telling the truth because his Appraisal skill had told him that Urushi was indeed a darkness wolf.

“I’ll let you guys enter the Crystal Cage’s depths if you can prove to me that you can escape from Urushi.”

“Really!?”

“You have my word, and as a man, I’m rather inclined to keep it.”

The current circumstance was the conclusion Gamud had come to after discussing his idea with us. The rules were as follows: the adventurers were to gather in the training ground’s center while Urushi stood by near the wall opposite the entrance. If at least five adventurers managed to escape him, then they would be considered the victors. However, they would lose in the case that Urushi managed to take down that same

number.

Not everyone needed to escape because Gamud had determined that they only needed five members to be able to make it back to the haunt's entrance in one piece.

Hearing the conditions laid out for them caused the adventurers' expressions to brighten. They seemed to think that the conditions were in their favour, and that they'd finally have permission to explore the Crystal Cage's depths.

They quickly agreed, and so, they joined Urushi in a game of tag.

"Run!"

"Uryaaah!"

"It's all up to you!"

The faster adventurers immediately darted towards the gate while Miguel, the greatsword user, and three others attempted to engage Urushi in combat in order to pin him down.

In other words, their plan had been to abandon four of their members right off the bat. Most notable of the bunch that'd been left behind was Wanda, who'd let loose a Fire Arrow in Urushi's direction.

For a moment, it almost seemed like they'd won. The escapees had almost made it to the gate, and Urushi hadn't budged. But that all changed when he finally decided to move. He disregarded almost all the attacks that came at him; they bounced right off his fur without inflicting even the slightest bit of harm. The only one he bothered responding to was the Fire Arrow, which he swatted out of the air with a paw before breaking into a howl.

"Awoooooo!"

Fear appeared all over the adventurers' faces. Their limbs froze in place, as if they'd been petrified. Urushi's howl was an application of the Howl, Fear, and Darkness Magic skills. The combination of the three abilities gave his cry the effect of terrifying any lower leveled foes.

"Woof."

The next thing the wolf did was use Shadow Slip to teleport while the party of nine was still frozen in a mix of fear and awe. His destination was obviously the door; he sealed off their escape.

He hit the five closest adventurers with his paws and dark spells as lightly as he could in order to send them flying back towards the room's center.

His foes failed to realize that he'd been holding back, and as a result, interpreted his weakened attacks as a sign that he didn't have much offensive ability. Hence, they decided to work together and attack him all at once. They chose defeating him over yielding.

"Shit!"

"One more time!"

They continued pressing on in an attempt to beat him down, but to no avail. All their physical attacks bounced off their fur. Likewise, their spells didn't end up having any effect either. He tore right through them with his fangs. They were able to put a little bit of damage on him from time to time, but he would heal it all off with Regeneration before he took any more.

But again, they didn't let up. They knew they had to get him away from the door, so they ended up coming up with a strategy. That is, they once again split into the same two groups as before, with Miguel's once again functioning as a decoy. Their intentions were obvious, and Urushi knew that he would eventually win so long as he just sat still by the doorway. Still, he decided to take the bait. He understood that the group wouldn't get much out of training with him unless he played along.

Dewfo's group took the opportunity to move towards the exit while avoiding Miguel's. They'd even stuffed their ears with cloth this time around so Urushi wouldn't be able to catch them twice with the same trick. Their faces were decorated with triumphant smiles. They thought they'd finally won.

All they needed to do was step out the door while Urushi beat down Miguel.

But they failed.

They failed to grasp the extent of Urushi's abilities.

“Growl!”

The wolf’s Darkness Magic allowed him to knock all four decoys out in an instant; they hadn’t even been able to buy the escaping party a full second. Though Dewfo’s group was very clearly intimidated by the ease with which Urushi had defeated their allies, they didn’t falter. Victory was right before their eyes.

Too bad for them, it simply wasn’t meant to be.

Urushi spun around and immediately chased down the party on the verge of escape. He zoomed right past them and once again blocked off the room’s exit.

“T-That’s ridiculous...!”

“Why is it so fast!?”

All five remaining adventurers realized that there was no way they could actually outrun Urushi, so they tried to take him down with one last desperate struggle — to no avail.

The first and second were hit by Urushi’s front paws. One ended up crashed into a wall after flying a full 10 meters. The other was knocked onto the ground. He tackled the third, swatted the fourth with his tail, and used Darkness Magic to half-kill Dewfo, the fifth and final adventurer.

Less than 30 seconds had passed since he overtook them, but they’d already all been rendered incapable of combat. There was no doubt that they would’ve died had this not been just a spar.

“And the winner is Urushi!”

“Awwwoooooo!”

Urushi let loose a spirited howl. It’d been a while since he’d been allowed to get a bit rowdy, so he was quite content with what’d just happened.

“And that’s it for today. ‘Course this time, I actually mean it.”

The adventurers managed to regain their consciousnesses, but they seemed quite exhausted. Urushi was a magic beast, so losing to him had felt much more impactful,

as it made them feel like they actually could've lost their lives.

We did all we could. The only other thing we could possibly do was hope that Gamud's disciples actually ended up learning the lesson their instructor had wanted to teach them.

Chapter 241

In Search of A Ship

Gamud led Fran back up to his office in order to give his disciples a bit of time to cool down.

“Thanks for today, you were a great help. Sorry it ended up taking so long.”

“Not problem. Also learned.”

“Did you really?”

“Nn. Thank you very much.”

Fran bowed to Gamud in an expression of gratitude.

At a glance, it seemed that Gamud had only made the request because he wanted us to beat down his disciples in order to curb the extent of their arrogance, but it was actually more than just that. He wanted Fran to learn a similar lesson. It was as if he was indirectly telling her that he didn’t want to see her get conceited. He wanted to make sure she was aware that there were stronger fighters out there, and that she would die if she didn’t remain aware of her own limits.

She picked up on his intentions even though I hadn’t mentioned them to her, hence why she chose to respectfully thank him.

“I dunno why you’re thanking me. You were the one that helped me out, after all.”

The guildmaster turned his face away from her out of embarrassment, an act that essentially verified his intentions.

“Nn. Still wanted to thank.”

“...You’re still young. You’ve got plenty of time to grow, so don’t push yourself too hard, you hear?”

“Got it.”

Fran thanked Gamud one last time and accepted the request’s payout before finally turning heel and leaving the Adventurers’ Guild.

[Alright. It’s finally time for us to find ourselves a ship.]

“Nn. Search immediately.”

“Woof!”

[You two sure seem pumped. Did something happen?]

“Tonight, curry. Io.”

“Woof.”

“Can’t be late. No matter what.”

“Ruff.”

Fran and Urushi looked at each other and nodded in perfect sync. It was almost as if their appetites had somehow allowed them to communicate while forgoing the need for words altogether.

They were motivated for all the wrong reasons, but I didn’t really mind so long as their attitudes would help us find a ship sooner rather than later. That said, I didn’t want us boarding anything too sketchy. We could always come back tomorrow if we didn’t manage to find anything decent by dinnertime.

“To harbour.”

[I hope we’ll actually be able to find something with the Beastkin Country’s crest on it.]

Finding one would make things more convenient because the Beast Lord had given us that one thing, but honestly, it didn’t matter too much. It seemed that Fran, or rather, the Black Lightning Princess, had become famous enough even in Barbra for us to get ourselves an escort job with ease.

I was more so concerned as to whether or not there would be any ships headed towards our destinations in the first place, and how big they were if they did actually exist.

Personally, I was hoping to board a larger ship, preferably something on the scale of an ocean liner. I wasn't really all that confident in a smaller ship's ability to make it all the way over to another continent.

While size was important, it wasn't the only thing we had to take into consideration. We also had to consider the crew's attitude. The Black Cat Tribe was apparently no longer being looked down upon by the country itself, but that didn't necessarily mean that all its citizens felt the same way. There wasn't really much of a point in boarding a ship whose crew consisted mainly of people that discriminated against Fran and her people. The captain's attitude was of particular importance, as it would dictate the manner in which his crew operated.

"Nom nom. That ship?"

"Nom. Woof. Nom."

Fran and Urushi were both fully aware that they were going to have curry for dinner tonight, but they still ended up choosing to chow down on a couple curry flavoured skewers as they looked around for a ship.

"Look."

[Did you happen to see a really nice looking ship or something?]

"That. Looks tasty."

[Oh. That's what you meant.]

The catgirl slowly drifted towards a nearby stall, seemingly attracted by its scent. The dish being sold had quite the interesting appearance to it. They folded up a bunch of dough in a conical shape before slapping something that kinda looked like Qeema Curry with all its liquid drained on top. It was kinda like an ice cream cone, but made with curry instead.

Both my companions happily shoved the stuff down their throats instead of actively looking around. It kinda seemed like I would have to take care of all the actual

searching.

We spent a bit more time in the port's general vicinity as the two gluttons I was accompanying went around buying and eating whatever they pleased. During that time, I managed to spot two different ships with the Beastkin's Country's crest, but I didn't particularly want to board either of them.

My reasons were as follows: the first ship seemed worn down and belonged to a really small company hoping to profit from international trade. All the crew members were relatively low level, and the same went for their sailing-related skills. I didn't feel like it was safe to board, in fact, I was more or less convinced that it was going to sink. The second ship was in much better shape, it looked prim and proper. The same, however, couldn't be said for its crew. They couldn't be called decent regardless of how you looked at them. They weren't really pirates just yet, but they were definitely getting there. We couldn't trust them. Boarding their ship was clearly a terrible idea.

As we hadn't found anything, we ended up wandering around the port for a bit longer, at which point in time we were greeted by a male merchant.

"Hey there!"

"Nn?"

"Are you maybe looking to escort a ship?"

"How can tell?"

Though we were on guard at first, we soon came to understand that our goal was fairly obvious to the average bystander. Most immediately recognized Fran as the Black Lightning Princess because she happened to be a young Black Catkin girl with a wolf at her side. In other words, they recognized her as an adventurer instead of just your everyday average girl.

She'd very obviously been looking at the ships that happened to be around, so the merchant had put two and two together and came to the conclusion that Fran needed to cross the sea. It was fairly typical for adventurers to take on escort missions in order to hitch rides, after all.

"That's why I approached you. What do you think about escorting my ship?"

Hiring an adventurer as strong as the Black Lightning Princess would not only secure the man's cargo, but also allow him to promote himself as a prestigious merchant. He sweetened up the deal by not only offering us a ride, but also a pretty decent reward along with it.

Though the offer was quite promising, we couldn't take it without first sorting out a few facts.

"Destination?"

"We were planning to set sail for the continent of Reddina."

"Can't."

The merchant looked quite disappointed, but ended up backing off shortly after Fran shook her head. I'd expected him to be a bit more persistent, but it seemed he was the type that knew that getting on Fran's bad side wasn't that great of an idea.

He wasn't the only merchant to speak to us. A few more tried asking us the same thing, but unfortunately, none of them were headed to Chrom, the continent in which the Beastkin's Country was located. Still, we kept looking around and didn't give up. In the end, it took us about three hours looking to finally find a ship whose destination was in line with our own.

I didn't know too much about ships myself, but, the bit of knowledge I'd managed to pick up from a certain pirate-themed manga told me that the ship in question was probably a galleon. It had five masts, and was definitely one of the biggest ships moored at the harbour. It even had a Beastkin's Country's crest on it, namely one decorated with a crown, meaning it was a ship that worked directly under the royal family. The sailors on board seemed disciplined, but lively nonetheless, as laughter often boomed from atop the ship's deck — a sign that the environment they worked in was at least decent. In other words, both the ship and its crew seemed like the kind we could put our faith in. Moreover, they would probably accomodate us if they could because we had Royce's ID card on hand, so I decided to try asking to see if they could let us on board.

[Hey Fran, how about checking that ship out?]

"Nn. Got it."

Chapter 242

Boarding Decision Made

We began moving towards the ship we had our eyes on, the massive galleon with the Beastkin's Country's crest on it. Its size made it seem like the type that wouldn't have too much trouble crossing the ocean.

[Hmmm... We're probably going to need to talk to the captain. What do you think we'll need to do to get ourselves a meeting with him?]

"Call out to crew?"

[That's definitely an option, but I'm not really sure if the crew'll know anything about you...]

The crew's members weren't merchants or adventurers, but sailors. They spent most of their time at sea, so I highly doubted they'd know much about Fran at all. That in turn meant they probably wouldn't be willing to call for the captain just because she, some random little girl, told them she wanted to meet him.

There was no guarantee they'd actually know the ID Fran had was the real thing either. They could easily call it a fake and dismiss us. The captain, on the other hand, probably had the ability to actually discern that it was genuine.

[What do you think of sitting around until we see someone that looks like they might be a bit higher on the corporate ladder and then just calling out to them?]

"Nn... Will call now."

[Whatever works for you works for me.]

Fran's method was straight forward, but it still did work, especially seeing as how there wasn't really a need for us to go into this thing with a plan in the first place. More importantly, Fran wanted to get this done and over with as soon as possible. She really didn't want to be late for dinner.

“Going.”

“Woof!”

The sailors seemed to be in a meeting of sorts, but both Fran and Urushi ran up to them and attempted to get their attention regardless.

“Hey.”

“H-Hi there. Did you n—”

“What’s u—”

The sailors had responded to Fran in a light-hearted fashion, but ended up immediately stopping and freezing up when they caught sight of Urushi. They then immediately began looking back and forth between the two without continuing what they were saying earlier.

Both their faces were clearly decorated with expression of shock. Fran didn’t really pay them any mind, and instead, moved onto asking for their boss.

“Adventurer, named Fran. Want to talk to captain.”

I felt like she could’ve been a bit more careful with how she introduced herself. I honestly wouldn’t be surprised if they turned her away because of her poor mannerisms.

But much to my surprise, they ended up doing the exact opposite.

“A-Alright! Give us just a second!”

“I-I’ll go grab the captain!”

A part of me felt like they probably recognized Fran.

“Y-You said your name was Fran?”

“Nn.”

“A-Are you perhaps the Black Lightning Princess? The one everyone’s been talking

about lately?”

My suspicions were on point. They really did know exactly who Fran was.

“Yup.”

“S-s-s-seriously!? Wait, I could’ve sworn the rumours said the Black Lightning Princess had evolved...”

The sailor’s words reminded me that Beastkin were able to discern whether or not another Beastkin had evolved. It was a function that clearly worked even amongst different tribes given that Fran was able to discern that both Aurel and the Beast Lord had evolved.

Fran, however, had the Evolution Concealment skill, meaning other Beastkin wouldn’t be able to tell whether she was just a Black Catkin or actually something more. Hence, the sailor must’ve felt confused by the discrepancy between what he saw and what the rumours had told him.

There wasn’t really much of a point in Fran explaining her circumstances, so she decided to ask her a question of her own in order to move the conversation forward.

“Evolved Black Catkin. Never seen before?”

“I-I’m from the Beastkin’s Country and I meet a lot of beastkin because of my line of work, but I can’t say I have.”

It seemed that Fran really was the only evolved Black Catkin out there, which did make sense in its own right. One would need to kill either 1000 Evil Beings or a single A ranked Evil Being in order to undo the curse. It was very unlikely that anyone would end up accidentally fulfilling either of the two conditions.

And honestly, the second way of undoing the curse was basically just there for decoration. The only way for an unevolved Black Catkin to solo an A ranked Evil Being was to have a miraculous stroke of luck.

The other condition, hunting down 1000 Evil Beings a piece, was the much less difficult to achieve. There was a chance that the other Black Catkin could eventually evolve if we spread knowledge of it far and wide. The stronger ones could even find themselves evolving into Black Heavenly Tigerkin.

It'd be possible to defeat an S ranked Evil Being and undo the curse on a species wide level so long as enough Black Heavenly Tigerkin came to be; there was definitely a chance for the Black Cat Tribe to one day remove its curse.

Having the entire race actively hunt down Evil Beings was something that benefited the gods. In fact, the whole point of the curse was to make the Black Cat Tribe repent through battle to begin with, but the Beast Lords of old had disallowed the Black Catkin their penitence.

Fortunately, the current Beast Lord was nothing like his predecessors. The situation would probably change for the better once he started disseminating information regarding the Black Cat Tribe's current evolutionary conditions. Of course, we couldn't leave it all up to him. We too had to make sure we spread the word once we reached the Beastkin's Country.

The sailor that'd left brought over an important looking man as I continued to contemplate the Black Cat Tribe's situation. His massive frame, which spanned a large area both horizontally and vertically, was decked to hell and back with huge burly muscles.

He was wearing a captain's hat atop his head, specifically the kind you'd typically expect a pirate ship's captain to have. The only difference between his hat and a real pirate's was that the skull had been swapped out for a crown bearing version of the Beastkin's Country's crest.

"Oh? Are you perhaps the Black Lightning Princess?"

"Nn."

"I see, I see. I've heard quite a bit about you from all the merchants passing through the city."

He started off with a rather grim expression, but he quickly replaced it with a friendly smile after seeing Fran nod in response to his words.

"So what'd you need me for?"

"Nn. Looking for ship. Going to Beastkin's Country."

"Were you wanting to board our ship as a guard for the trip's duration?"

“Nn.”

“Hahaha! Great, looks like we’ve got ourselves one hell of a reliable escort then.”

“Okay to board?”

“Course it is. I can tell just by looking at you that you’re one damned strong fighter.”

The captain seemed to be quite decent in combat himself seeing as how he was able to discern that Fran was strong with just a glance.

With all the pleasantries out of the way, we decided to show him the emblem we’d gotten from Royce.

“Huh. You’ve even got one of His Majesty’s IDs...?”

“Genuine.”

“I’d assume so, seeing as how you’re the Black Lightning Princess, but I’ll have to run it by to check if it’s actually real a bit later on.”

“Nn.”

“The Adventurers’ Guild will get mad at us if we don’t make sure the request goes through them, so we’re probably going to have to get that handled. You mind tagging along?”

It seemed the captain couldn’t actually employ us on the spot, but he was more or less willing to do the equivalent. Having the guild handle the request was also beneficial to him in the sense that it’d allow him to verify Fran’s identity.

“Don’t mind.”

It also seemed like he was planning to hire a few other adventurers as well just so he could have more hands in the case of an emergency. We didn’t really see any problems with it, so we accompanied the captain to the guild and accepted the request the moment it was done being processed.

“Leaving when?”

“We should be setting sail in three days if all goes well.”

He wasn't too sure about the precise date because it could change based on magic beast sightings and the weather. Storms in particular tended to be a major source of delay.

“Got it. Will go to ship in 3 days.”

“Sounds good to me. It's good to be working with you.”

“Nn. Same.”

Fran and the captain exchanged a shake of hands before going their separate ways. We probably wouldn't see him again for another three days. That said, I was already looking forward to boarding that huge ass ship of his.

Chapter 243

The Orphanage's Current State

"Nom nom nom nom nom!"

"Om nom om nom nom!"

"You two sure are digging in."

"Wow Fran! You're so awesome!"

"Yeah! Look at Urushi! He's super amazing too!"

We were currently at the orphanage, where Urushi and Fran were both rapidly tucking Io's curry away. They were eating so vigorously that I was starting to worry whether they'd give themselves stomachaches.

I was also concerned as to whether or not it was okay for them to eat as much as they were, given that they were at an orphanage. Fortunately, Io didn't really seem to mind. In fact, seeing them eat the way they were had caused her to break into a smile.

"I've made a whole lot, so eat all you'd like."

"Nn! More."

"Woof woof!"

"How large a serving would you like?"

"Huge."

"Roof"

In the end, the pair ended up eating five super large servings apiece, to which the children reacted with both admiration and a bit of resentment. It seemed like they'd probably be able to have curry the next morning so long as Fran and Urushi didn't eat

it all.

Some of the kids had actually cared much less about that, and much more about how much Fran could actually eat. Though they seemed a bit less attached to the curry itself, a fair portion of them still ended up gazing at her a bit reproachfully because their incorrect predictions had caused them to gamble away a part of their breakfast.

I figured it'd probably be a good idea for us to pay Io back later for all the food we ate. The orphanage was definitely much better off than it'd been before, but it was still an orphanage nonetheless.

"Thanks."

"Ruff."

"No, thank you. I'm glad you enjoyed it as much as you did."

"Nn. Tasty."

Fran patted her now swollen stomach a few times to express just how content she felt. The curry Io made was clearly ridiculously delicious, so much that she almost seemed a bit envious of the fact that she couldn't have it on a regular basis.

Unfortunately, it wasn't something I was capable of imitating. Io was running an orphanage, so she obviously hadn't used any super expensive spices. She was only really using the standard kinda stuff, meaning the curry she made was only as delicious as it was because of her abilities as a chef. I would've been able to mimic her variation of the dish had I watched her throughout the entire preparatory process, but I hadn't.

The children had already finished their meals, and didn't have much of a reason to stick around, so they went off to play. The only people left in the cafeteria were Fran, Urushi and Io.

"Leaving now."

Fran stood up and got ready to go as she stroked her stomach.

"Already? You should really take it easy and stay around for a while. I'll even make you some tea if you do."

“Brewed by Io?”

“Mhm. I can even get you some snacks with it if you’d like, though unfortunately, all we have is baked sweets.”

“Yes please.”

Fran had been presented a chance to have herself some Io-brand tea alongside some Io-brand tea time snacks, a chance her more gluttonous side simply refused to miss.

Driven by her appetite, she sat herself back in the chair with a series of graceful, flowing movements. Likewise, Urushi, who shared her dietary interests, also positioned himself in a chair while clearing his expression of all but composure.

“Don’t worry Urushi, I’ll make sure you get your share too.”

“Woof!”

The baked sweets Io made were quite simple. They only contained sugar, flour, and eggs, but a simple glance at the way Fran and Urushi reacted to tasting them made it quite apparent that they were delicious regardless. The same went for the tea even though the leaves used to brew it were considered rather cheap. Both gluttons enjoyed the experience so much that they ended up wearing expressions of bliss throughout the culinary experience.

Io watched over the two with a smile basically the whole way through. More specifically, she waited for Fran to finish draining her tea before addressing her in a much more serious tone than usual.

“Thank you very much.”

Her expression turned serious as she bowed as she spoke a few words of appreciation.

“Nn?”

“I admit I splurged a bit for today’s sake since I knew you were coming, but it was well worth it. Your actions have brought genuine smiles to the children’s’ faces. They’ve just been overflowing with joy ever since you reached out and offered us your help.”

Fran stayed silent and listened as Io continued to speak.

“We, the children and I, used to spend our days with the constant fear that we wouldn’t have enough to eat. The children still used to smile, but not the pure, carefree way they do now.”

They never knew when the orphanage would end up having to shut down, so it only made sense for them never to really have peace of mind. Children had the tendency to be naive, but that didn’t mean they were stupid. The building they lived in was more or less decrepit, they only had very little to eat, and they’d even been bothered by a loan shark every once in a while. The signs were all there, and they were more than obvious enough to tell the children that the orphanage wasn’t doing too well.

All the adults involved would always try their best to hide their financial troubles from the children. This would stress them and cause the children to notice their displeasure, which in turn stressed the children out, which of course only lead to the adults redoubling their efforts. It was a vicious cycle with no end in sight.

“Thank you very much for allowing the children to smile again.”

“Helped by Amanda. Not me.”

“You’re right. Amanda was the one that helped us out of our conundrum, but that was something she’d only done because of you. She would’ve never had the opportunity to help us if not for you informing her of our plight. Thank you, thank you so much.”

Io pushed herself into an even deeper bow, as if to demonstrate that she couldn’t thank Fran enough for what she’d done.



And so, an hour flew right by.

Things ended up getting a bit awkward after Io finished apologizing, seemingly because both parties were feeling a bit embarrassed. The two had been on pretty good terms to begin with, so they managed to drive the discomfort out of the air around them and get back to engaging in conversation.

“Leaving now.”

“I’m sorry I kept you for so long.”

“No problem.”

Io escorted us all the way over to the orphanage’s entranceway. We tried to offer her some cash given all we’d eaten, but she ended up stubbornly refusing any form of payment. She insisted that she’d only fed us as a way of expressing her thanks, and that there was no way she could charge us for it.

(Master, what do?)

In the end, we ended up holding onto the money we’d planned on giving her. I figured it would be rude to force her to take it after all she’d said, and that she’d actually be much happier not accepting it.

Speaking of happiness, Fran seemed to be in a great mood. She’d even hummed a rare tune as we made our way back to the inn.

[Was the curry she made really that tasty?]

“Nn!”

Oh god damn it. I’m going to have to try really hard not to let her best me.

“Besides.”

[Besides what?]

“Seemed happy. Both Io and orphans.”

[That they did.]

“Nn. Glad.”

To Fran, the orphans under Io’s care weren’t just strangers. They were people whose situation paralleled her own. She too had lost her parents at a young age, so, she must’ve empathized with them. Seeing them happy had tugged at her emotions and filled her with a wholehearted sense of joy.

[Yeah, I guess you’re right. I’m also glad everything ended up working out in their favour.]

“Nn.”

Chapter 244

Aboard a Ship

Fran, Urushi and I spent the three days leading up to our ship ride walking around the city, eating, and just lazing around. The rare bit of downtime served to function as a decent break from all the action we normally threw ourselves right into.

We actually ended up visiting the orphanage a second time. Our timing had been a bit off, so Fran and Urushi didn't end up catching themselves a meal, but they did manage to get themselves a cup of tea and couple baked sweets, which, for our purposes, was more than enough. The whole reason we'd visited was so we could give them a bunch of stuff, and use their hospitality as just cause for doing so. Of course, we made sure to give them more than enough stuff to also make up for all the curry Fran and Urushi had consumed. I figured they probably wouldn't be all that comfortable with us giving them money, so we ended up giving them ingredients instead. More specifically, we handed off a bunch of flour, some sugar, and several different kinds of spices.

Though lazing around was nice and all, we were still rather keen on actually going places. To that end, we set out early in the morning on the day we were scheduled to leave and immediately headed in the ship's direction.

[Looks like we're finally taking our first step towards the Beastkin's Country.]

"Nn. Can't wait."

[I'm pretty sure we can do a much better job at guarding the ship this time around than we did the last. That said, don't forget to enjoy the ride.]

"Can't wait. Tough foes."

We'd gotten a lot stronger since our last boat trip. I was pretty sure we'd be able to handle anything that came at us with ease, save for maybe the Midgard Wyrms.

When we arrived at the ship, we saw the captain talking to a group of people that seemed to belong to some sort of government office. I wasn't really sure exactly what he was talking about, but he wrapped things up and began calling out to Fran when he

noticed her.

“Hey Black Lightning Princess. I think I forgot to introduce myself last time. The name’s Jerome, captain of the HSS Algieba.”

“Nn. C ranked adventurer. Fran.”

The pair exchanged a handshake. They almost seemed to be on the same wavelength or something, as the act caused both to smile. It was a rare moment for Fran, who typically really didn’t care for appearances.

“Hey, you! Get over here. Show Fran to my first mate and have him introduce himself.”

“Yessir.”

“I’m stuck doing a bunch of stuff so I can get us ready to sail, so my second in command’ll fill you in on all you need to know.”

It turned out that the people Jerome had been speaking to belonged to the Ministry of the Port. He needed to work through a few details with them before the ship could actually depart from the harbour. The government officials more or less functioned as sea traffic control. They were making sure people worked on a schedule and only departed when it was their turn to leave. Likewise, they also made sure each ship was assigned a priority so that any lower priority ships would yield in the case of a schedule conflict. Their function was near identical to the sea-traffic control stations you’d see back on Earth.

The world I was currently living in definitely was a totally different world, but its port-related rules were quite similar. I honestly wasn’t surprised, rules were needed no matter where you were, and the ones that both worlds had chosen were not only functional but also rather easy to implement. Ships like the Algieba only emphasized the need for regulation all the more. Allowing large ships to leave whenever they wanted would lead to a whole slew of issues.

“Should be over here.”

“Nn.”

One testament to the ship’s sheer size was the 100 odd step staircase we needed to climb to get up to its deck from the harbour.

A large group of sailors were working the day away atop the ship's massive deck. The one that was supposed to be guiding us walked past most of them and approached a man that seemed to be supervising everyone else's work.

"Vice Captain!"

"What? Oh, I'm guessing that's the last escort?"

"Yessir. Her name's Fran."

"C ranked adventurer. Fran. Accepted escort mission."

"Me, I'm Buphett, the captain's first mate."

Unlike the captain, the first mate didn't really seem like much of a fighter. He was tall, lanky, and to be frank, seemed a bit frail overall. Appraising him allowed me to confirm that he was the type that stayed out of battles. Both his combat related skills, Bow Arts and Spear Arts, were still at level one. To compensate, he had high levels in Commerce, Way of the Word, Arithmetic, and Observation. In other words, he was great at everything he needed to be proficient in to qualify him as the ship's second in command.

Though his skills did draw my attention, I found myself much more interested in his race than anything else. He was apparently a sort of goatkin, so I couldn't help but suspect that he would end up eating the documents he was supposed to fill out.

"I've heard plenty a rumour about you, but honestly, it's a bit hard for me to believe that the Black Lightning Princess everyone's been talking about is still just a little girl. I thought I might change my mind after seeing you, but..."

"The captain says she's legit though."

"Nn. Genuine."

"Sorry if I offended you. I was just trying to say that it's really hard for an everyday civilian like me to tell that you're really strong. To be frank, you look just like every other beginner to me."

"Not offended. Used to already."

“Hahaha, good to hear. I guess I should probably have you meet the other adventurers we hired. I hope you guys’ll be able to get along.”

“Will be careful.”

“Please do. Give me just a second to have them all brought over.”

Buphett ordered several of his subordinates to go fetch the other adventurers. It seemed that they were all already here, and that we were in fact the last to arrive.

“Total, how many?”

“We hired a total of 12, you included. We’ve got a few decent fighters amongst the crew, but we still tend to hire adventurers for a good few reasons.”

It’d become something along the lines of a tradition for ships that worked directly under the crown to hire adventurers, an act that served to show that there were ties between the royal family and the guild. More importantly, adventurers proved quite useful in the case of an emergency. Most tended to have a ton of experience, so they could really aid in keeping everyone calm and battle-ready. To that end, most ships would make sure they grabbed a few adventurers in addition to just having a few battle ready crew members on board.

“I believe you’re also the only one that’s running solo.”

“Strong?”

“I’m not qualified to gauge how strong they really are, but, there are a total of three parties, with their party-wide ranks being C, D, and E respectively. The C ranked party’s leader is probably the strongest of the group. He himself is a B ranker.”

I was impressed that there was actually a B ranker aboard the ship, as I assumed the person in question would end up being decently strong. However, I couldn’t help but feel as if having them around would end up being more of a pain in the ass than anything else, as we would have to listen to their orders in the case that something happened. I myself didn’t really mind, but I somehow doubted Fran would obey the person’s commands.

“It looks like they’re here.”

“...Strong.”

[Seems like it.]

The crew members led the adventurers that'd been inside the ship onto its deck. The warrior-like man at the group's forefront immediately caught our attention. He, the B ranker Buphett had just told us about, looked much stronger than the rest. A sense of deja vu struck me as I looked at him. I felt like I'd seen that blue armour of his somewhere before, but I couldn't pinpoint exactly where. Chances were, we'd probably crossed paths at the Adventurers' Guild or something, but I wasn't really too sure.

“Right this way, Mordred.”

Hearing his name made me suspect that he was going to end up betraying us at some point, but the more rational part of my mind told me that it would probably be fine.
[1]

“This is the last adventurer that'll be joining us in escorting the ship.”

“Oi, what the hell? Why'd you go and call my bro Mordred all the way out here just to introduce him to a puny little girl? It would've been much more polite for you to have her head over to him instead goddammit.”

The short man next to Mordred angrily responded to the first mate's summons as soon as he laid eyes on Fran.

What pissed me off the most was that he wasn't wrong. Fran, a mere little girl, was technically lower on the the social ladder than a B ranked adventurer. Hence, many of Mordred's party members ended up nodding along to voice their agreement.

“Boss, these bastards are making light of y-”

“Shut up Slunin. You're embarrassing yourself.”

But he was soon cut off. Mordred, the person the angry midget had complained to, had spoken up as if to silence him.

“Eh?”

“We were the ones that were told to move because it’s natural for the weak to go out of their way to convenience the strong. Putting on a show of respect is our job, not hers.”

“W-What’re you saying bro!?”

Witnessing the natural manner in which his boss had submitted caused Slunin to shout in surprise. He was quite loud, but Mordred paid him no mind. He instead turned towards Fran and bowed.

“Excuse that subordinate of mine. He tends to be a bit rude.”

“Nn. Don’t mind.”

“Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Mordred, I lead the C ranked party known as the Iron God’s Breath.”

“C ranked adventurer. Fran.”

Slunin seemed hella pissed. He clearly felt that Fran should’ve been paying Mordred her respects instead of the opposite because she was just a C ranker. He was about to start yelling again, but Mordred cut him off before he could.

“Am I right in assuming that you’re the Black Lightning Princess?”

“Called that often lately.”

“I thought so. I saw all your fights.”

“Was at Ulmutt?”

“Yes, but I was the only one of my party members that was there. I participated, but ended up losing to Fermus in the second round.”

Only then did I realize why I felt like we’d seen him before. We hadn’t met him, but we’d watched his matches. Fran also ended up recalling him after I reminded her of one of the battle’s key points.

“Lava Mage?”

Mordred had been pretty good at using Lava Magic. I very vividly recalled being impressed by how he'd made it seem like such a valuable skill to have.

"You remembered me?"

"Nn. Because strong."

"I'm honoured to hear that from the person that defeated an opponent that wiped the floor with me."

"So uh... boss, care to explain?"

"You guys were holed up in the Crystal Cage back when it happened, so I doubt you know, but she's the person that won third place. She's still a C ranker right now, but she's in no way weaker than an A ranker."

"Shit!"

"You serious!?"

"You've gotta be kidding me...!"

"I'm serious. She's way stronger than me."

""""We're really sorry!""""

All three of Mordred's subordinates dove in front of Fran and started prostrating the moment Mordred's declaration left his mouth. Seeing them had made me realize that they weren't so annoying after all. They were punks, but honest ones. Fran seemed to feel the same, as she wasn't really angry either. Instead, she seemed to be finding the sight of three massive dudes prostrating themselves before her to be more curious than anything else.

[1] Arthurian legend. Mordred the traitor.

Chapter 245

The Cabin

Everyone started introducing themselves after the C ranked party, the Iron God's Breath, finished apologizing to Fran.

At first, I thought that they didn't actually need to go as far as prostrating. However, the combination of the willingness with which they did it and the jock-like impression I got from them made me feel that to them, it wasn't really anything out of the ordinary.

Their overbearing attitudes seemed to have entirely vanished. They instead had started to bow submissively over and over as if to make up for their mistakes. It seemed that Mordred's statement, his proclamation that Fran was far stronger than he was, had left a pretty deep impression on them.

I was honestly surprised that one word from him had caused their attitudes to change so drastically. Most other adventurers would still doubt Fran's strength because she looked the way she did. A bit of further consideration led me to realize their willingness to accept Fran's strength came from their trust in Mordred. They seemed absolutely certain he'd never lie to them.

Although Mordred's subordinates didn't really question the authenticity of his words, I did. Fran was definitely stronger than him, but she was only really *way* stronger than him in her awakened state. The way I saw it, he was an accomplished Magic Warrior skilful enough to match even Colbert in single combat. He'd make for a dangerous opponent if we didn't take him seriously.

"And these are my four party members."

""""We look forward to workin' with you.""""

"Nn. Same. Will also introduce again. C ranked adventurer. Fran. And Urushi."

"Woof!"

"Woah, that wolf just came out of nowhere!"

“I-It rose from the shadows!”

“Well then. He looks quite strong.”

“Nn. Reliable.”

Unlike his subordinates, Mordred remained calm even though Urushi, a decently powerful magic beast, had appeared seemingly out of nowhere. In fact, he even ended up smiling after affirming the wolf’s strength, as if to express he was glad to see another fighter amongst our ranks. I really did have to take my hat off to him. All the other adventurers had backed off and just stared at the Darkness Wolf from afar.

“I guess I might as well introduce everyone else. First up’ll be these guys. They’re Red Earth, a D ranked party.”

“It’s good to be working with you.”

“Sup.”

“Eyyyy.”

Though the party’s leader seemed to be the formal, uptight kind, the same couldn’t be said for its two other members. They both gave off a much more laid back impression. I couldn’t help but notice that everyone in the party had green scales growing on their arms and faces, a feature that apparently clearly denoted them as serpentkin. I couldn’t help but feel that they were a bit weird, not because they had scales, but because they all seemed to be a part of the exact same demographic. Their well built frames were all about the same size be it in height or width. Likewise, they all wore twin swords and had similar-looking faces.

“Identical.”

“Ahahahaha. That’s cause the three of us are brothers. We’ve been wandering the world and adventuring together for quite some time. It’s been a while since we last went home, so we decided to take this escort mission so we could head back for a bit.”

Their appearances weren’t all they shared. All three of the serpentkin had been taught by their father, so they’d ended up with the exact same skillset. The uncanny resemblance they bore to one another led me to suspect that they were probably triplets. The only real way for me to tell them apart was to look at their hairstyles. I

didn't really think that to be too reliable, so I decided to appraise them each time we spoke to them going forward in order to make sure we knew which was which. For the record, the uptight leader was actually the oldest of the bunch.

Though Red Earth came off as a bit intimidating, I found that they were actually pretty decent people. They didn't seem to hold any prejudice against Fran's tribe.

"These last three belong to the Crystalline Defenders, an E ranked party."

"H-Hiya."

"Fancy seeing you again."

"Ahahaha..."

The last three adventurers were actually our acquaintances. In fact, they were still quite fresh in our minds because we'd only just sparred with them a few days ago. They were Miguel, the greatsword user, Liddick, the earnest spearman, and Naria, the female archer.

"Oh, you guys already knew each other?"

"Kind of. She crushed us in a spar just a few days ago."

"Right, you guys were the guildmaster's apprentices, huh? Man, I'm jealous. I would've loved me a chance to spar with the Black Lightning Princess. Well, I'm glad you know her. Makes things more convenient."

Though the Crystalline Defenders barely counted as our acquaintances, I still preferred having them over someone we didn't know for the sole reason that they'd already come to understand that Fran was strong.

"Here, why?"

"Well, the truth is, sparring with you taught us just how weak we really were."

"Everyone talked a bit, and we realized that we were starting to get sloppy because of how big our party was. Having nine whole people just ended up making us feel too relaxed."

“We decided to split into three smaller parties so we could start training ourselves again from the ground up.”

Apparently, they hadn't actually wasted the lessons they'd learned from fighting Fran. They'd realized that something was wrong and immediately acted on it.

“Okay. Good luck.”

“Thank you.”

“We'll do our best!”

“Thank you very much for both the instruction and words of encouragement!”

The captain's first mate pulled Fran and Mordred aside for a quick discussion after everyone introduced themselves because he'd recognized them as the two most influential members of the group. The other adventurers didn't seem to mind, as they'd left after stating that they'd go along with whatever the pair decided.

“We should probably figure out how we're going to handle the chain of command. Any ideas on your end? As for me, I don't mind either way. Feel free to take over if you want.”

Mordred was the type of guy that valued ability, or more specifically, strength in combat, over all else. He was more than willing to yield his position to Fran, but honestly, both Fran and I lacked the skill set necessary to fill it. The lava mage was much better suited to the job. Hence, we ended up rejecting his proposal.

“Bad at giving orders.”

“Alright, go on.”

“You take command. Want to be treated as autonomous unit.”

Fran had basically said that she wanted to just be able to do whatever she wanted in response to the situation at hand. In other words, her proposition was a selfish one that allowed her to retain her freedom while also casting away all the troublesome responsibilities that came with taking charge.

“That's fine with me, but can you make sure you check with me when you're going to

start acting on your own?"

"Nn. Will be prudent."

"You're stronger than me, so I'll try not to give you orders if I can, but I still will if we get into the kind of emergency that calls for it."

"Of course."

"...Alright."

Mordred heaved a heavy sigh, but ended up agreeing to go along with our idea nonetheless. It seemed that we were going to be fortunate enough to do as we wished for the most part.

"It looks like the two of you have wrapped up your meeting, so, Fran, why don't I show you to your room?"

"Nn."

"I'm sorry in advance, but, it's going to have to be just a bit on the smaller side."

"No problem. Just need bed."

"I don't think you'll need to worry about that. There's no way we could possibly treat you *that* poorly."

One of the sailors led Fran to her quarters. The room she was assigned to was a private room meant for the ship's stronger fighters; its close proximity to the deck made it easy for her to get to wherever she needed as quickly as possible in the case of an emergency.

"This'll be your room."

"Nn. Looks good."

"Good to hear. I'm glad you like it."

The sailor seemed to think Fran was complimenting the room just for the sake of it, as he seemed a bit ashamed of it throughout the conversation, but she and I honestly

both really liked it.

It was a bit on the smaller side, but that was literally my only complaint. It was a private room with a clean bed, some drawers, a closet, and a decent looking desk. There was even a magic lamp suspended from the ceiling. It was way better than the cheap inns we usually stayed in.

Though with all that said and out of the way, the one thing that really iced the cake was the round window decorating the room's outside wall. It was exactly the kind of window you'd expect to see on a seafaring vessel. A single ray of light streamed in from it and illuminated the room's otherwise dim interior. That was all it did, but, that alone was enough to really emphasize that we were in a ship's cabin.

Fran seemed to like the room's ambient atmosphere, as she sat herself down on the bed and started swinging her legs back and forth. The expression that decorated her face was clearly one of excitement.

"I like this room."

[Yeah, me too.]

She laid down and started rolling back and forth on the bed until she eventually tired herself out.

Chapter 246

The Algieba Sets Sail

A sailor brought Fran to a room not too far from her own, one labeled as the Captain's Quarters.

"I heard that you met the other adventurers, and that you seemed to get along quite well. Do you think you can work with them?"

"No problem."

"Good to hear."

The captain seemed really relieved to hear that Fran was capable of getting along with the other adventurers. At first, I didn't quite understand why, but then I recalled the rumours. It seemed that he had been worried that she might start a fight with one of the other people he'd hired.

Fran was strong, and honestly speaking, probably one of the best escorts he could get. Therefore, as captain, he needed to consider what his options were. Jerome had to be ready to make a choice between Fran's might and Mordred's experience in case she ended up antagonizing him.

"Chances are, we'll be running into magic beasts, and maybe even a couple pirates. But until that happens, you can just kick back, relax, and do whatever you want."

"Nn. Got it. Want to explore ship."

"Explore? I mean, I don't mind, but I don't quite see the fun in it."

"Okay to?"

"It shouldn't be a problem as long as you don't enter the sailors' private quarters without their permission. I'm also going to have to ask you not to mess with the magic item we use for propulsion."

“No problem.”

“Oh, and don’t mess up the storehouse. We don’t really have anything to hide to begin with, so that should be it for the off limits areas.”

“Really okay? No fear of theft?”

“You’re bound by the contract you signed with the Adventurer’s Guild, and we’re rather inclined to assume it’ll hold. ‘Sides, none of the stuff we have is valuable enough to warrant you risking your reputation.”

We managed to get the captain’s permission to explore the ship, but we didn’t go looking around at every nook and cranny right away. We were going to be aboard the ship for quite some time, so we decided to take our time and explore it bit by bit as the voyage went on.

“Oh yeah, can you show me that Beastkins’ Country ID you got?”

“This?”

“Is that space time magic...? Sure seems convenient.”

“Nn. Very.”

“I’m jealous. That’s something any merchant would want. Anyway, I’d better get to checking this thing for authenticity.”

The captain’s voice slowly shifted over to carrying a more serious tone as he spoke. Though he himself couldn’t technically be called a merchant, the function he served was rather similar. To that end, he shared many of their sentiments.

Apparently the captain’s ring had a sort of function that allowed him to double check whether the ID thing we were given was legit, as he pressed the two against one another.

“Interesting, so it really was the real thing.”

“Nn.”

“We should be setting sail some time in the afternoon. For now, I’ll have to ask you to

go talk to Mordred.”

“Got it. Mordred’s room, where?”

“It should be right next to yours. Do you need me to get someone to help you find it?”

“No need.”

When the captain said right next to, he’d meant that Mordred’s room was literally just two over from Fran’s. He was sharing a triple room with a couple of his subordinates.

The reason we had to meet with Mordred again was so we could sort out how we were going to handle shifts. Mordred had already sorted out all the details, so he told us that we were going to have to stand guard during the night once every four days.

He then went over a few other escort mission fundamentals, as Fran had very little experience with them. The most important thing he highlighted was that any magic beasts we defeated would end up belonging to the people that’d hired us.

To compensate, the escort group would be granted a bonus based on the total number of enemies defeated. This calculation was done on a group-wide basis as opposed to an individual one in order to prevent the adventurers from arguing with one another.

Individuals could still be given additional rewards in some cases if they proved to be truly outstanding, but that was it.

One of the guild’s clerks had already told us all that information when we accepted the request, but Mordred had wanted to reiterate it just to make sure everyone was fine with the rules, as there were many cases in which adventurers would later complain that they were unfair.

“I think that’s everything. I’m looking forward to working with you.”

“Nn. Same.”

Fran shook hands with Mordred and headed back to her own room. There wasn’t much left to do but wait for departure.

Fortunately, we didn’t have to wait too long for some sort of event, as a sailor soon came and informed us that lunch was ready. Today was still our first day here, and we

had no idea where to go. The sailor seemed aware of it, as he ended up showing us over to where the food was being served. There, Fran ate her fill before heading back to the room and plopping herself down on the bed yet again. I really had to say, the escort mission we were on had some pretty damned good benefits to it. It included all three meals and the servings were big enough to satisfy even Fran. The fact that it took place on a boat only served to add to just how novel and fresh it felt.

I was about to pay the mission another compliment or two, but my thoughts were cut off by a sudden sense of oscillation. It didn't seem to be just my imagination either, as Fran sat up and started restlessly scanning her surroundings.

"Master, shaking?"

[Just a bit. It doesn't really seem like an earthquake though, so... I guess that means we finally set sail.]

The boat was massive, so it didn't really shake in response to the small waves that'd been constantly hitting it. The same, however, couldn't be said for when it lifted its anchor.

"Will go check."

[Sounds like a good idea to me.]

We rushed out of the room and gazed toward the port, only to find that it was a bit further away than we remembered. Both Fran and Urushi then ended up running all the way over to the ship's edge and looking down.

[Huh, so we really are moving.]

"Nn."

"Woof."

The cityscape slowly began to drift away from us. We weren't being seen off by a crowd of people with streamers and whatnot, but that was probably because we were on a merchant ship as opposed to one meant to transport civilians. Besides, tens of ships left the port every single day. There was no way every single one could be sent off.

[This ship sure is fast.]

The ship was moving much more quickly than I'd expected. I wouldn't have been surprised if its current speed was what it had with its sails hoist, but they were all currently still in their folded up states.

I started to grow curious about the magic item that propelled the ship forwards. It had to be really powerful to be able move such a large vessel so quickly.

One of the first things that I considered was its shape. I really wanted to know whether it used a propeller, an aqua jet, the wind, or maybe even something else altogether.

[Let's go check it out once you've calmed down a bit.]

"Explore!"

[Hell yeah.]

Jerome, the ship's captain, approached us as we continued to look over past the deck.

"Hey. You catch sight of something interesting or somethin'?"

"Moving."

"Huh? Oh, I'm guessing you don't really spend too much of your time at sea then."

"Nn. First time on big ship."

"Makes sense then."

"Moving using magic item?"

"You got it. This ship has actually get the newest magical propulsion system on the market. That's not all either. It's also equipped with a barrier and eight turrets to help drive off monsters and the like."

It turned out they were using a whole slew of magical items. Though the ship looked like something from my world's middle ages, it was actually far more technologically advanced. The magical engine system it was using would allow it to continue moving even without the wind's assistance.

Wait, they even have a barrier to help keep things away from them? Why would they

need to hire escorts if they had something like that?

Fran relayed my question to the captain, to which he reacted by informing us that the barrier wasn't perfect. Its main function was to hide the ship from larger magic beasts, and thus, it had very little effect on any of the small or medium sized ones, which, to me at least, made a lot of sense. The sea was full of larger magic beasts, and many of them would sink the ship if they struck its hull.

There was a second barrier device that worked against the smaller-scaled magic beasts as well, but all it did was make them less inclined to approach.

One of the bigger reasons ships hired escorts was because they needed more hands on deck to fight off pirates. Most pirates avoided ships that worked directly under a country's command because they were concerned that they would ultimately get wiped out after catching the country's attention. That, in other words, meant that the only thieves interested in targeting the HSS Algieba were infamous pirates confident in their own abilities.

The Algieba's access to the newest magic engine model made it capable of outrunning most of its attackers, but it would still sometimes be intercepted, rammed, and subject to an attack.

"I'm going to be counting on you, Black Lightning Princess."

"Nn. Leave to me."

"Hahaha. You sure do sound reliable. Looks like we'll be getting to our destination in one piece."

Chapter 247

A Discussion About Routes

And so, a whole day passed.

“Another storehouse.”

[Well I mean, this is a merchant ship, soooooo...]

“Smells good.”

[Yeah, it looks like this is where they keep all the foodstuffs.]

We’d already started exploring the ship’s interior. At first, there hadn’t really been much to see, reason being that we’d started atop the deck and slowly made our way down. Most of the sailors’ rooms were located near the deck so they could react quickly in the case of an emergency. Hence, the first area we ran into was the only one we weren’t allowed to check out in too much detail.

Most of the rooms on the lower floors were just storerooms. The door to the room with most of the more valuable stuff in it was locked, but pretty much everything else was still open to exploration.

All we found in the storehouses were boxes, bags, and a whole tonne of dust, but Fran was having fun looking around nonetheless.

Likewise, I also hadn’t lost interest in looking at all the odd ingredients, nor the strangely designed goods the boxes seemed to contain.

“Moving on”

[Sure.]

We left the storehouse area and entered a room near one of the ship’s outermost sides. There, we found a huge, cylindrical lump of metal with a hole in the middle. Its surface almost seemed to give off a sort of dark glow.

“What’s this?”

[Looks like a magical cannon. It uses those balls of iron as ammo and propels them with magic.]

“Why iron balls?”

[The projectiles it fires are weaker than actual spells, but are probably much more efficient with mana. It runs on magical energy, but it probably only has a finite amount of it.]

The cannons we were looking at seemed to be rather high class, as they could switch between physical and magical rounds. The physical rounds were probably for other ships, while the magical rounds would instead be used on magic beasts.

I couldn’t help but feel that the cannon was much bigger than the ones we had back on Earth, in part because it had a magical engine strapped to it.

We ventured further downstairs after inspecting the cannon and found ourselves in the ship’s lowermost subsection. Most of the space was taken up by the ship’s ballast tanks, many of which were filled with water. The second largest room, however, had an item of interest in it, another large magical device. Said device was almost constantly emitting a sort of low-pitched rumble.

“Huge.”

[I guess this is probably the engine the captain was talking about earlier.]

“Nn. Really loud.”

[Hmm... that part has water coming out of it, and this one looks something like a pump.]

The engine seemed to be the aqua jet type. It used a huge pump to suck in water and then forcefully ejected it in order to propel the ship forwards.

Several of the ejection devices were placed around the ship’s hull. It seemed like it could use them to not only change direction, but also make tight turns.

We’d more or less finished exploring, and Fran wanted to get a bit of exercise, so we

headed back up to the deck in hopes of being able to find a spot to do a few practice swings. Upon arrival, we found that the deck was actually quite busy. Jerome was ordering the sailors around as they scrambled to raise the masts.

“We’re finally out that damned gulf! Men, get ready to sail!”

“Yessir!”

“Get your lazy asses ready! We’re going full speed ahead ’till we hit the Kraken’s Nest!”

One of the things the captain had said immediately nabbed my attention.

“Kraken’s nest?”

“Oh hey, didn’t see ya. The Kraken’s Nest is exactly what it sounds like, a danger zone where you’ll find a whole shitload of Kraken.”

“Passing through?”

“Well, I guess you could say that.”

I knew the ship had a barrier that let it ward off large magic beasts, but I couldn’t help but feel as if passing through a place called the Kraken’s Nest wasn’t too good of an idea.

“We aren’t actually going to be passing right through it. We’ll just be skimming the edge of it is all.”

Fortunately, the captain’s intentions hadn’t been what I was imagining them to be.

Kraken were the local ecosystem’s top predator, so most other magic beasts naturally chose to avoid their territory. This was especially true of medium sized magic beasts, as kraken had the tendency to prey on them.

“We shouldn’t have to worry about getting attacked by magic beasts there so long as we mind the kraken.”

“But kraken?”

I was worried that a kraken would attack us and totally screw us over, but, according

to Jerome, the chances of that were particularly low. The barrier was designed to make the ship especially difficult for kraken to detect.

As I wasn't completely convinced, I had Fran ask about the other larger magic beasts that lived in the area, to which the captain replied with a rather simple answer: there were none. The only large magic beasts that lived in the area were the kraken.

"Why?"

"The patch of sea between the Gilbard continent, from which we just departed, and the Chrom continent, our destination, is only a couple hundred meters deep. Relatively speaking, it's quite shallow."

Apparently, most of the other oceans were much, much deeper.

"Most B ranked magic beasts, like Whale Lords, Water Dragons, Leviathans, and Dagoes, prefer to live in deeper waters."

None of the types of magic beasts the captain had just mentioned had ever been spotted in the space between the Gilbard and Chrom continents.

"But the part of the sea between the Gilbard and Brohdinn continents, the Demon Sea, makes up for it. It's filled with powerful beasts, and has even got the world's one and only known S rank leviathan."

The legendary leviathan in question was said to be over 1000 meters long, capable of creating tsunamis while turning over in its sleep, and, all in all, one of the strongest magic beasts to have ever existed.

That said, very little was known about it. Sightings were few and far between. There was, however, a significant mention of it dating about 3000 years back in which it completely obliterated a coastal nation that'd pissed it off overnight. Said report was likely true as it had apparently been confirmed by someone with an oracle-type skill.

One of the most surprising but well known facts about it noted in the aforementioned report was that the S ranked leviathan's staple food was in fact the Midgard Wurm, an A ranked magic beast. It would leave its nest, capture one, and then slowly feast on it over the course of about 100 years. Most sightings of it would happen precisely during these hunting sessions.

Naturally, the legendary leviathan was only one of the many massive magic beasts that inhabited the Demon Sea, so most ships going between Gilbert and Brohdinn would avoid passing through it. They'd instead take a safer route and stop by Chrom along the way. The route we were currently on was just that much safer.

But despite that, it still had enough kraken for one of its subsections to be labeled the Kraken's Nest.

"You won't have to worry about encountering any Kraken. This ship's got all the kraken countermeasures a sailor could ever ask for."

"Nn."

"But we've dedicated most of our resources to it, so we'll have to be relying on you to deal with pirates and all the other magic beasts, y'hear?"

"Got it. Leave to me."

"Course."

Chapter 248

A Report on Midgard Wyrms Ecology

Several days had passed since we left Barbra.

All we'd done so far was relax. There wasn't really much to do in the first place unless we ran into some sort of magic beast, so we'd spent our days eating, sleeping, and occasionally enjoying the salty sea breeze while getting a bit of exercise on deck.

Purification magic allowed us to keep the room clean without having to tidy up.

The meals were not only hearty, but also quite healthy. Item box-type skills allowed the sailors to preserve fresh fruits and vegetables throughout the trip. Beriberi and scurvy were both total non-concerns.

That said, depleting the ship's resources wasn't actually the crew's first choice. They would much rather eat whatever they could catch. To that end, they were currently hauling up a giant net they'd thrown down for fishing purposes a bit earlier.

It wasn't something Fran had ever seen before, so she ended up doing more than just observing them. She joined them in saying "heave, heave ho," over and over as they raked the net in. The only difference was that she muttered it under her breath instead of shouting it.

"Gahahaha. You never seen a couple guys lug up a huge net before or somethin'?"

"Nn. Interesting."

"Thought so. The only ships with nets that big are huge ones."

"Really?"

"The only way you could haul up a net that big without a bunch of people is if you have some sort of magic item do it for you. And y'see, both those options require big ass ships."

“Oh.”

“Sides, the bigger the net, the bigger the catch, and the bigger the catch, the bigger the chance you’ll attract or even catch magic beasts. Fighting them off needs manpower and space. It’s not something you could do on a small boat ‘nless you want to put yourself in danger.”

The captain’s words led me to the conclusion that it was about time for us adventurers to finally do our jobs.

“I’m pretty sure my men’ll be fine without you for now, but y’might as well keep an eye out.”

“Nn.”

Fran got into position just in case anything happened, but nothing really did. The sailors hoisted the net onto the deck and laid out all the seafood they caught without running into any show-stopping issues.

“Those, fish, or?”

[Which ones? Are there magic beasts mixed in or something?]

“Soft and flabby thing.”

[Oh, you were asking about those? Those are goosfish.]

Goosfish were really strange looking, so it did make sense for people that didn’t know about them to assume they were magic beasts. I heard that many people outside Japan feared octopuses, but I myself found goosfish way more terrifying.

“And that?”

[Those are hagfish.]

“And those?”

[I’m pretty sure those are sea cucumbers, though they’re way bigger than any kind I know.]

The world I was currently in was a veritable fantasy world, but its fish honestly weren't that different from the ones we had back on Earth. In fact, I felt that most of them were easier on the eye; Earth's fish were way uglier on average.

"And that?"

[Which?]

"That."

There were too many fish jumbled together for me to identify the one Fran was trying to point out to me, so she just ended up walking over and picking it out of the pile.

"This."

[Oh, ew.]

The fish in question was one of the grossest looking ones I'd ever seen. I really had to commend Fran's willingness to touch it. She'd lifted it up without even the slightest bit of hesitation.

It, the thing in Fran's hand, looked to me like a reddish-black, softball sized, blob of flesh. One end was shaped like an intestine. It came with an alien-like mouth, one that had its sharp teeth arranged in a circular pattern. The other looked like it'd been pinched. My immediate reaction was to assume that it was some sort of deep-sea creature.

Appraising it caused me to telepathically shout in surprise.

[That thing's apparently a midgard wyrm!]

"Midgard Wyrms? This?"

[Y-Yeah, it's probably only that small cause it hasn't grown up yet.]

"Ohhh."

I almost couldn't believe that the tiny magic beast Fran was holding onto could possibly grow into the 100m long thing we'd fought before. The only way one could possibly describe the creature was to call it fantastical.

[T-There's one over there too.]

"Where?"

[It's that long thing over there.]

"This?"

Fran grabbed the long, rope-like organism I was talking about with her bare hands. Its colour and texture were identical to the midgard wyrm larva Fran was holding in her other hand, but their lengths were incomparable.

The first specimen was about the size of Fran's palm. The second was about a whole meter long. That said, they were still both definitely midgard wyrms.

"This becomes that?"

[I think so... Oh god that thing's gross. Its unevenness only makes it all the worse.]

The longer specimen wasn't just thin and long. It looked like a bunch of spheres stuck onto one another. The indents ran along it in an almost regular sort of pattern.

Jerome approached Fran as she continued to observe the still-wriggling midgard wyrms.

"Oh, so you managed to find a couple puny midgard wyrms."

"Nn."

"At that size, I'd say they're probably still only a few months old... Their parents might still be in the area."

"Thought only kraken around here?"

"For the most part, yeah. There are a couple other things, just not too many of 'em."

"Fought midgard wyrm before."

"You mean recently?"

“Nn. Very recent. On way to Barbra.”

“Seriously? If that’s the case, then we’d best be on our toes.”

“What to do if attacked?”

“Midgard wyrms tend to react most to smell, so we should be able to outrun them if we just throw a couple barrels overboard as a decoy.”

It looked like we wouldn’t have to worry because the ship had countermeasures on hand. That said, we were still quite curious as to their ecology. Jerome actually seemed really knowledgeable about them, so we decided to have him sate our curiosity.

“This becomes that?”

“Yeah, but the stubby one you’re holding onto won’t just grow longer or anything.”

“Then how?”

“They get longer by sticking together. You see how the longer one’s got indents all over? And you see how they’re about the same length?”

“Nn. Narrow parts.”

“That’s because that’s where two midgard wyrms are connected. The larvae bite onto each other’s butts in order to form chains. As time passes, they eventually all merge into a single creature.”

The fuck nature?

I was freaked out at first, but immediately recalled that there were similar creatures back on Earth. I wasn’t too clear on the details, but a part of me wanted to say that most were single-celled organisms and/or something along the lines of a jellyfish.

Hearing Jerome’s explanation finally led me to understand why the damned things had so many hearts. A midgard wyrm was both a single giant magic beast and an entire colony of smaller magic beasts at the same time. It was that precise trait that stopped them from being affected by Deathgaze’s instant kill ability.

“What to do?”

“They’re parasitic and not that great for the sea, so we’ll gather them up and dispose of all of them at once later. You seem to be able to pick them out, so could you lend us a bit of a hand?”

“Got it.”

Our Appraisal and Magic Perception skills made it easy for us to sort through the pile and pull all the magic beasts it contained. The tasks’ only two downsides were that it was boring, and that it made Fran’s hands stink. That said, the stink could be cleansed, so I made a mental note telling myself that I should cast purification magic on Fran’s hands once we were done.

The screening process ended up finishing without any real hitches; today’s haul hadn’t seemed to contain any dangerous magic beasts. More importantly, it looked like tonight’s dinner was going to consist of quite a few interesting fish-based dishes.

(Master.)

[What’s up?]

(Want to take bath.)

[You do know we’re on a ship in the middle of the ocean here, right? That’s definitely going to be asking for too mu-wait a second. Maybe not, actually.]

Getting our hands on hot water would be a cinch since it was something we could make with magic. The only real problem was that we didn’t have a bathtub. We’d normally just make one out of earth magic, but there wasn’t any soil anywhere in sight.

They probably had wooden wash basins somewhere, but I figured we’d be able to find some sort of higher quality substitute if we looked hard enough. Asking led to the surprising answer that the ship actually had a bathtub on board.

At first, I thought that having a bath on board was a luxurious addition that we shouldn’t have expected, but soon realized that I was wrong. I should’ve known there’d be one seeing as how the ship was equipped with a whole slew of expensive magic items to begin with. In fact, it turned out that most larger ships actually did have them.

We only hadn’t really heard of other people using it because sailors didn’t like bathing.

I wasn't really surprised. Sailors were, for the most part, wild seafarers not too different from pirates. I couldn't exactly see them sitting down and soaking in a tub. They didn't normally bother getting the baths ready at a set time because it was just an added cost that few ever made use of.

Fran started heading over the moment they told us we were allowed to make use of it as long as we got our own hot water.

Mordred, Buphett, and several other guys had told us they also wanted to get in, so we ended up telling them it was ready once we finished with it.

Buphett had been particularly happy about being able to take a bath, and even asked us to keep taking them going forward so he could as well. Fran liked washing herself on a daily basis anyways, and I kinda liked the idea of him owing us a favour, so we ended up happily agreeing.

Chapter 249

Finally, Action

A day had passed since we learned a bit more about midgard wyrms.

We were still living the high life. Fran had taken a bath last night, so she had been in an excellent mood all morning.

For the record, we made sure to drain the bath and refill it with a whole new tub of water once Fran was done with it. No way in hell was I going to let a bunch of dudes soak in the exact same water she'd just finished using.

Fran had spent most of the day gazing at the horizon, observing the fish and dolphins that passed by, and idling around in her room whenever she got bored.

But, that afternoon, our peaceful boat trip finally came to an end.

The clanging of a loud bell filled our ears. It rang four times, paused, and repeated. The four-clang pattern was a signal whose meaning we'd memorized ahead of time. It denoted that the ship was being attacked by pirates.

[Pirates!?!]

"Going!"

"Woof!"

Fran grabbed me and rushed out to the deck. There, she found the captain, who happened to be in the middle of issuing orders to his crew. He had the sailors move around so that they'd be in position for the battle to come.

Mordred seemed to have been on the deck from the start, as he and his men were currently leering at something to the north.

"You're here? That was fast. I'm impressed."

“Pirates, where?”

“They’re right over there.”

We were certainly able to make out something where Mordred was pointing, but it was too far away for us to make out any significant details. We couldn’t even tell it was a ship, let alone a pirate ship.

“Those, pirate ships?”

“No way in hell they aren’t. Damned things have got pirate flag raised high.”

Jerome sounded really confident. At first, I thought he was somehow able to just naturally see really far, but upon closer inspection, I realized that he had a telescope in hand. He’d clearly used it in order to scope out the incoming ship.

“Escape possible?”

“Doubt it. Those over there are fast, small ships, and the wind ain’t really doing us any favours right now. They’ll probably catch up in about an hour.”

“Then will fight.”

“We’ll probably have to. It doesn’t seem like they’ve got any intention of letting us get away.”

I highly doubted that the pirates would be able to damage our large boat with their much smaller ones. I highly doubted that they’d be able to board us even when they finally caught up. That said, there was no way they’d initiate a battle they didn’t think they could win.

“Those ship’s have got naval rams engineered into their front. They’re probably planning to breach our hull and have their men board us.”

The pirate ship’s naval ram wasn’t entirely solid. It had a passageway built inside of it for ease of infiltration. Their strategy was one crafted under the assumption that the ship they would be attacking was larger than their own.

They would catch up to us with their high speed vessels, stop us by ramming us with several different ships, and then break into our galleon’s interior. It was a much safer

method than the one I thought of, lining their ships up with ours and boarding via ladder. As the defenders, I found it honestly quite difficult to deal with their approach. We had to be concerned with the fact that there'd be enemies inside our ship from the very start.

"How?"

"We basically have to fall back on the basics and sink 'em with spells and cannonfire before they reach us."

The thing the captain had told us really was pretty much the most basic possible thing one could do in a naval battle. The pirates needed to get up close and personal if they wanted to be able to board us. All we needed to do to stop them was to make sure they never got close enough to actually reach us. That said, I felt that engaging them up close wouldn't be too bad an idea. We could just beat the pirates down, capture them, confiscate their ships, and trade them in for cash once we reached the shore.

"Sinking 'em is probably the best option, 'cause the aftermath's a huge pain in the ass to deal with if we don't."

"Reason?"

"Think about it. We need a place to lock 'em up till we reach the shore. We'd also need to feed 'em and keep 'em alive. As for the ship, we'd need to transfer a couple men over for it to actually get places."

"But enemy treasure will also sink?"

"The only way they'd have loot on their ships is if they just finished attacking somethin'. I doubt any of the ones attacking us'll have anythin' valuable on board."

"Okay."

The captain had a good point, and more or less convinced me that it was perfectly okay for us to just sink the incoming pirate ships.

"The only ships worth capturing would be the larger ones. Their propulsion systems can fetch a pretty penny on the market. They can rake in such a profit that I'd say it'd even be worth it for us to attack them instead o' the other way 'round."

Jerome's tone was so serious it sent shivers down my spine. Merchant ships reeeaaaally weren't supposed to be attacking pirate ships, were they...?

"I'd be more pissed if they got away than 'nything."

Though the captain knew of most of the pirates around these parts, he didn't recognize the group attacking us. Their flag was an unfamiliar one.

"They probably either came from the north or south. We'd best be careful, they've already thrown five ships our way."

That said, the appearance of a brand new group of pirates wasn't anything to be too concerned about. The place was practically a hotbed for pirates because of all the merchants ships that would make use of the route. Pirates practically infested the place, but most merchant ships were ready for them. The act of attacking was actually quite the risk. Still, the sheer frequency with which merchant ships passed through the area still attracted them from all over, often leading to territorial disputes and the like.

Several bigger pirate gangs more or less completely dominated the area. It was really hard for a newly arrived crew to really make too much of a name for themselves, and it was for that reason that the appearance of a new band of pirates really wasn't anything to be concerned with. They were probably just going to end up getting taken over by one of the bigger gangs eventually anyways.

"Them sending out five ships means they think they've got a pretty good idea of exactly where we are and how much we can fight back. It'd be best for us to sink 'em."

I wasn't sure what the norm was, nor whether or not it'd be fine for us to butt in just yet, so Fran turned towards someone with a bit more experience for advice.

"Mordred, what do?"

"The battle'll start with an exchange of cannonfire. We adventurers, er, the spellcasters we've got, will start firing spells once we get close enough for it."

The lava mage's explanation made perfect sense to me, as the ship's cannons had more range than most spells. Still, I felt it was inefficient. Both we and our enemies had cannons, so we'd effectively just be trading damage at first. Jerome and Mordred both told us that taking some damage was a foregone conclusion when we asked them

about it. As far as they were concerned, trading hits was just a natural part of naval battles to begin with. We, however, opted to disagree.

“Hey.”

“Yeah?”

“Leave to me.”

“I take it you’ve got something in mind?”

“Nn. Will sink enemies.”

“Sounds promising to me, but you sure you’re up for it?”

“Sure.”

“Hm, I don’t want you doing anything that’ll put you in too much danger. We’ve still got a long trip ahead of us, and we’ll be needing you to power our way through it.”

Jerome exchanged glances with Mordred, as if silently asking the B ranker whether or not he thought Fran would actually be able to pull it off, to which he replied with a nod.

“A rankers are strong enough for us to call them flat out inhuman, and she’s got enough power to take one down. Me, I’d say she’ll be just fine.”

“Alright then, go fer it. Just make sure you don’t damage our ship, ‘lright?”

“Got it. Going now.”

“Going?”

“Nn. Going to sink enemies. Urushi.”

“Woof!”

“Woooah! Your wolf was actually that damned huge?”

“I’m... starting to think that it could probably even beat me up...”

Fran ignored Jerome, who's eyes had shot open in surprise, and mounted Urushi.

“Go.”

“Woof!”

And so, the two of them leapt towards the pirates, leaving naught but a series of shocked sailors in their wake.

Chapter 250

Anti-Ship Sword

Urushi was so fast that he managed to close the gap between us and the pirate ships in the blink of an eye.

We used our bird's eye view to observe the pirates, only to find that they were staring up at Fran with dumbfounded looks on their faces. The daze lasted for a moment, as they immediately drew their bows, nocked their arrows, and attempted to shoot us down. It was a vicious attack, but not one that bothered Urushi even in the slightest. He dodged them all with ease.

[Alright, let's do this.]

"Nn."

[You know what? I'd say this is probably as good a chance as any to run a few experiments, just so we can be a bit informed going forward.]

"Explain?"

[I was thinking we could try and figure out the most efficient way for us to sink a ship. What do you think about hitting each of the five with a different kind of attack?]

We were still going to be at sea for quite some time. I highly doubted that we were only going to run into a single group of pirates. Figuring out the most efficient way of eliminating them would definitely function to our own benefit.

Fortunately, none of the pirates out on the deck seemed strong enough to catch my eye. They weren't going to be capable of getting in the way of our experiments—unless we messed up really hard, that is.

[Let's start by trying out Lightning Magic.]

Last time, we'd only managed to sink the pirate ships we encountered by hurling massive rocks at them. We'd grown a lot since then, we now had a much wider variety

of options.

“Kanna Kamui?”

[That’s a bit too extreme for just pirates, don’t you think? Plus, we won’t be able to use it several times in rapid succession.]

I figured Kanna Kamui would allow us to obliterate all five ships off at the same time if they happened to be close enough, which, upon further inspection, they actually seemed to be. However, I decided to write it off for the time being, as it would defeat the purpose of the exercise I’d planned.

Kanna Kamui aside, I began to consider our options. Spells like Thunderbolt were rather decent, but they lacked the power to take out an entire ship in just one hit. What we needed was something in the middle.

[Oh, I know.]

I began to focus so I could cast a powerful spell. It wasn’t anything on Kanna Kamui’s tier, but it was still powerful nonetheless.

[Alright, let’s go!]

“Nn!”

[Ekato Keraunos!][1]

Countless thunderbolts descended from the sky the moment I chanted the spell’s name. They shot towards one of the pirate ships and annihilated it in the most literal sense of the word. It had been completely and utterly erased, there wasn’t even the slightest trace that it’d been there in the first place.

Looking at the result made me feel as if I’d gone a bit overboard.

Ekato Keraunos was a spell that created exactly 100 bolts of lightning. It was up to its caster to determine exactly how those 100 bolts would act. It didn’t take much effort to concentrate them on a single target as I’d just done.

Though it only output 10% of Kanna Kamui’s power, it was still evidently way stronger than what was needed to take down a small ship. It looked like we wouldn’t need to

use anything more than our regular AOE lightning spells to wipe them all out if we wanted.

The pirates stopped attacking. Seeing one of their allied ships flat out vanish seemed to have scared them shitless.

That said, they didn't seem to think Fran had attacked them, but rather, that the ship had been hit by some sort of abnormal, weather-related phenomenon. To them, it must've looked like the lightning bolts had just randomly descended from the clear sky above.

"Next, my turn."

[Sure.]

"Nn. Thor's Hammer!"

Her follow up, however, clearly revealed that it'd all been her doing from the start.

A huge magic circle appeared right above one of the ships as Fran chanted the name of the spell that we'd gotten by leveling Lightning Magic up to level 8, the spell that'd failed to break Fermus' defenses.

The thick, high powered lightning bolt that came with the spell descended from the magic circle. It tore the ship in half and left the pieces it touched charred black. Whoever named the spell had aptly described it; its aftermath made it look as if the god of lightning himself had descended, swung his mighty hammer, and smashed it right into the ship.

[That spell looked like a pretty good fit.]

"Nn."

I couldn't help but think back to our battle with Fermus. He'd managed to mount a perfect defense against an attack that could totally wreck a pirate ship in one hit, albeit a small one, with nothing more than just his threads. He really was one hell of a strong fighter.

[Let's try a different approach now, namely one that doesn't make use of brute force.]

“What do?”

[I mean, all we’re doing is sinking a ship here, so we should be able to finish it off by just blasting a hole through its hull or something.]

“Really?”

[I’m pretty sure, yeah. We’ll have to see how this goes.]

I used the level 4 flame spell, Exploding Flare, and shot it towards the sea.

It did exactly as it was supposed to, and launched a large fireball that ultimately ended up exploding with a loud boom.

[Welp. That failed.]

“But made hole?”

[Yeah, but I didn’t hit the right spot. I was supposed to make a hole in the underside of its hull, not in its flank. I mean, they’ve still got water flooding in, but not enough to sink them right away. Man, Flame Magic gets really hard to control when you’re at sea.]

“Then what?”

[We’ll have to change it up a bit is all.]

I recast the same spell, but this time, enveloped the resulting projectile in a wall of wind so I could stop it from touching the seawater.

This time, I managed to accomplish my original goal of blowing a hole in the ship’s underside, but I didn’t actually manage to sink the vessel right away. The seawater had weakened Flare Explosion drastically, so the hole had ended up being way too small.

On the bright side, I did manage to move the fireball to the exact place I wanted it before it detonated, the pirate ship’s propulsion system was no more. The ship as a whole wouldn’t be sinking right away, but it’d eventually go down, especially seeing as how it could no longer move. Of course, that wasn’t to say I’d succeeded. The method I’d just devised would allow the pirates on board more than enough time to escape.

[I guess that means we should fire a few more at it.]

“Got it.”

We fired off another five projectiles and totally wrecked the bottom side of ship’s hull. It was no longer able to keep the water out, and so, it began sinking in earnest.

Our third approach did work, but it took far too much time, and required us to get too close to the ship. Honestly speaking, it wasn’t very practical.

[Next, I guess.]

“Next method?”

[It’s been a long time since I’ve used a full powered Telekinetic Catapult, so I was thinking of maybe giving it a go.]

“Got it.”

I was really curious as to the total amount of damage I’d be able to output, so we put every last bit of effort into powering up my attack. We used my telekinesis, alongside elemental blade and Fran’s wind magic. We poured in every last bit of mana we could and purposefully avoided considering the effect the attack would have on my durability.

“Ready?”

[Ready.]

“Nn!”

Fran borrowed the help of a wind spell to boost me up to a high speed. I telekinetically accelerated myself even further the moment I left her hands.

[Leggoooooooooooo bitchessssss!]

It felt really nice to finally let loose and just bash myself into something as hard as I could.

I destroyed both the ship’s masts. I hit the first head on and totally wrecked it before

striking the second around where it was rooted into the ship. Despite that, I didn't show even the slightest sign of stopping.

My blade smashed through the pirate ship's hull; it penetrated every last wall and pillar before opening a massive hole in the seacraft's hull.

I knew that was what'd happened, but it'd all gone by so quick that I hadn't been able to process it. For me, it'd been more of a three step process. I left Fran's hands, hit the mast dead on, and then suddenly found myself underwater.

Only after returning to Fran did I realize that I'd punched a huge hole in the ship. My telekinetic catapult had done quite a bit more damage than I'd been expecting it to do.

That said, overboosting elemental blade had totally killed my durability. It was kinda wasteful, and probably not worth using on a mere pirate ship.

"One ship left. Last method?"

[It's kinda already started running away, so we should probably find ourselves a method that'll allow us to sink it real quick.]

I began thinking about what we'd done so far in order to figure out what might work. It looked like using wind magic might be a good idea for the time being, as I'd be able to stall them with a cross wind.

"Can I choose?"

[Sure, what do you have in mind?]

"Need to ask Master to do something."

Fran explained her concept to me. I was honestly quite surprised to hear it, as it involved pushing my ability to transform to the limit. Long story short, she told me to make myself huge.

Shape shifting itself wasn't really anything out of the ordinary. I'd already tried becoming threads, as well as a shield on occasion. But this was going to be my first time literally just supersizing myself and nothing else.

She still wanted to be able to swing me, so I kept my handle the same size, but boosted

the hell out of both my blade and guard with everything I had.

I ended up being way bigger than I expected. I'd long surpassed the horse slayer in terms of size; my blade had grown to be almost a whole 10 meters long. I'd more or less transformed into one of the anti-ship swords that a certain mech would always swing around. [2] [3]

[This work for you?]

"Nn. Perfect. Going now."

[Please do. I won't be able to keep this up for too long, so I'm going to have to ask you to be as quick as you can.]

"No problem!"

Fran more or less did the same thing she did to Rynford to the pirate ship. She jumped off Urushi, boosted my weight, cast elemental blade, and drew me from a sheath made out of air as she approached the ship.

"Haaaaaahhh!"

Naturally, the attack divided the pirate ship in two. The sheer amount of blunt force the strike carried caused the wood that made up the ship's hull to fly all over the place as Elemental Blade set the whole goddamned thing on fire. The ship had no hope of surviving the attack. Neither its front nor back half could do anything but sink into the ocean's depths.

In the end, we figured that Thor's Hammer and my Anti-Ship Sword mode were probably our two best options, with the former being better against a smaller number of foes, and the latter a larger group.

"Done."

[Pretty much, yeah.]

Chapter 251

Master and Teacher

“Well, that’s the Black Lightning Princess for ya!”

Captain Jerome happily greeted Fran with a full faced smile upon her return. He was very pleased to see that his ship had remained undamaged despite the pirate’s assault.

Likewise, the sailors had even started cheering for her. Not a single one of them seemed to be sympathizing with the pirates, nor the miserable fate they’d met. That said, their actions weren’t abnormal. The world we were currently living in was one in which you had to eliminate your enemies and the people that tried to steal from you; it was kill or be killed. To that end, having a powerful ally was something deserving honest gratitude.

Unlike the sailors, most of the adventurers had ended up going quiet and turning meek, but not out of fear. Rather, they seemed to be trying to express their respect. Though adventurer rankings were based on more than just one’s ability to enact violence, overwhelming strength was still a force that called for powerful feelings of admiration.

The only member of the group whose expression was any different was Mordred. He, unlike the others, seemed more taken aback than anything. He ended up smiling in a bit of a wry manner as he called out to Fran.

“Man, you’re strong. You’re the first person I’ve ever seen whose strength and rank differ as greatly as night and day.”

He had a fair point. Fran was way more powerful than any C ranker should be.

“Listen up y’little shits! We’re getting the hell out of this stretch of sea as fast as we possibly can!”

“Yessir!”

“The battle turned out to be a bit too flashy, y’see.”

Jerome was worried that the loud sounds and huge shockwaves would attract Magic Beasts to our current location, especially seeing as how there were a bunch of pirates floating around in the area. They would likely soon be preyed on.

Hence, it would be best for us to get the hell out of the area as soon as possible.

“Went too far.”

“I wouldn’t say that. The lil’ bit of risk we just incurred is well worth getting out of that situation scot-free.”

“While I do agree with the captain, I’d like to say that it would be better for you to keep try to keep the flashiness in moderation, if possible.”

Jerome was all smiles. He didn’t seem to mind what we’d done at all. Buphett, on the other hand, took a bit more reasonable an approach to the whole situation. I decided to adopt it and be a bit more careful going forward.

Fran started heading back towards her room right after she finished speaking with Jerome, but was interrupted before she could leave the area.

“W-We’d like to ask a favour!”

“Please make us your apprentices!”

Miguel, Liddick, and Naria rushed in front of her, prostrated, and began asking for her guidance.

“The way you fight is incredible.”

“We want to get strong, much stronger than we are now.”

“So please make us your apprentices!”

All three of them seemed earnest, frantic, and desperate for her aid. I wanted to help them, but I didn’t feel like it was actually plausible for Fran to take them as her apprentices, as they’d get in the way of her travels. More importantly though, she didn’t really seem like the type that’d actually be capable of teaching.

Still, she seemed to have something in mind.

“My apprentices?”

“Yes ma’am!”

“Please!”

“We beg of you!”

All three pressed their foreheads against the ship’s deck as they awaited a response.

[Wait, are you actually gonna do it?]

(No. But interested.)

[We can’t really have them accompany us though.]

There were two major issues associated with letting them travel with us. The first was that they’d slow us down, and the second was that they might figure out our secret.

(I know.)

[Just had to make sure. But what exactly are you planning then?]

(Nn. Will make apprentices for duration of boat trip.)

[Right. That does sound like it could work.]

Fran’s suggestion did sound like it would work. The three had their own room, so they probably wouldn’t be able to figure out that I was an intelligent weapon.

[Well, I mean you do you. My only concern is, do you actually think you’ll be able to teach them properly?]

(Nn? Yes. Because interested.)

[Well, alright. Just make sure you let them know that it’s your first time teaching anyone. I’ll be all for it so long as they don’t mind.]

“Nn. Will make apprentices. But just during boat trip.”

“R-Really!?”

“Thank you so much!”

“But never had apprentices before. No experience teaching. Still okay?”

“That’s perfectly fine!”

“We’re happy to have your guidance, Master!”

Fran sent Liddick a sharp glare and freaked him out a bit the moment he declared her his master.

“Don’t call me master.”

“Huh? Why not?”

“Because no. Not me. Master only reserved for the best.”

I was glad Fran respected me and all that, but calling me “the best” was taking it a bit too far. That said, I wasn’t going to stop her or anything. Shit would start getting really confusing if people started referring to Fran as “Master.”

“Can call me anything but Master.”

“A-Alright.”

“Think of different title.”

“S-Sure thing.”

The three adventurers managed to nod even though Fran was looking at them in a serious, intimidating manner. They looked at each other and quietly discussed a few things before finally simultaneously turning back towards her.

“W-What if we called you Ms. Fran then, like we would if you were our teacher?”

“Teacher?”

“Y-Yeah. Does that work?”

“Nn. Teacher acknowledged.”

She seemed to have taken a liking to the title, as she nodded while repeating “I’m a teacher,” several times over.

“Starting training immediately.”

“““Yes Ma’am!”“““

The joy of being referred to as a teacher had totally pumped her full of motivation.

I was really curious as to exactly what she was going to tell them to do. Though I was really curious, I wasn’t really planning on butting in regardless of whether or not what she told them to do was anywhere even remotely within the realm of being sane. The three had asked for her to train them, not me. All that mattered to me was that Fran enjoyed the experience.

“First is...”

Fran paused for a moment, which in turn caused her three disciples to curiously repeat her words, as if to urge her to continue.

“Practice swings?”

“Practice swings? Got it! We’ll be right on it!”

Though her tone seemed to carry a few hints of confusion with it, Fran had managed to get them off to a pretty decent start. A part of me had even started to suspect that she just might actually have a talent for teaching.

Miguel and Liddick abided by her orders and immediately began practicing. Miguel swung his greatsword up and down, while Liddick started to thrust his spear forwards and backwards.

Naria, however, seemed not to have any idea what to do. Fran’s instructions had been directed towards her as well, but she was an archer. And as far as she was concerned, there wasn’t really any point in swinging her bow around like a melee weapon.

“Umm... Am I supposed to join them? I don’t really use swords or anything...”

“Only carrying bow?”

“Yeah, that’s it.”

“Only using bow is bad. Will die in close combat.”

“Umm... So does that mean you want me to learn how to use some sort of weapon I can use up close too?”

“Nn. Recommend shortsword. Not for attacking. Defending or throwing only.”

Watching Fran in action allowed me to confirm that she really did have talent for instructing others. I was surprised at how well she was handling everything.

“Okay!”

“Will feel unnatural at first, but start today.”

“I definitely will!”

Fran pulled a rusted shortsword out of her dimensional storage and handed it to Naria. I was confused as to where she’d got it from, so I asked her about it. Apparently, it was something that she’d looted off one of the goblins we killed some time ago.

“Here.”

“Is it really okay for me to take it?”

“Nn. Rusted, can’t be used in combat. But good enough for practice.”

“Thank you very much.”

Fran silently watched over Naria as she began to get a feel for the weapon. Her face had on it a clear look of satisfaction.

“Ummm... Am I doing this right? Do I just keep swinging it around?”

“Nn.”

Though Fran didn’t actually give Naria any direct advice on how she was supposed to

swing it around, I didn't disagree with her methods. Repetitive training was something that ultimately made one better at wielding a weapon, and the existence of skills only made said training all the more worthwhile. Hence, Fran didn't actually need to say anything to her newfound apprentice. All she needed to do was watch over her so she could make sure she continued to practice her use of the weapon.

And in fact, that was exactly what she did. She tirelessly continued to watch over all three adventurers without getting bored or distracted. As for me, I was really looking forward to seeing whether or not Fran would be able to drive them to improve by the time the boat trip was over. I was excited to find out just how far they would go, if anywhere at all.

Chapter 252

Fran As A Teacher

Today was the day after Fran decided to accept the three adventurers she met back at the guild as her temporary apprentices.

It was still quite early in the morning, but she'd already gathered them so they could start another day's worth of training.

"First, stretches."

"Stretches? What's a stretch?"

Liddick mulled over the word that he'd clearly never heard before, as if contemplating its meaning.

"I dunno, but I think it's probably something related to some sort of super training!"

"Are you sure? It sounds more like a spell to me."

Miguel and Naria answered him in turn, each with their own respective interpretations of the exercise.

It turned out that stretching wasn't actually something this world's people normally did. They did have warm-up exercises, but none of them were meant to increase one's flexibility. The concept of stretching, as I knew it, was completely foreign to them. In fact, Fran herself had only started stretching after I instructed her to and informed her that it was good for her. And now, she was taking that bit of information and spreading it.

"Warm up before exercise."

"Er, alright, but is there actually any point to it?"

Liddick began questioning the exercise before Fran could get to demonstrating or explaining.

“Nn.”

“Huh, interesting. Could you explain what the point is?”

“Warming up. Many benefits.”

“Many? Could you give a few specific examples?”

“Nn? Many is many.”

Although Fran knew that stretching would improve her condition, she wasn't able to explain why. She had clearly forgotten all the theory behind it even though I vividly recalled explaining it to her not too long after we first met. As far as she was concerned, stretching was just another routine exercise she drilled into her body for the sake of getting stronger.

All three of her apprentices had initially reacted to her clearly incomplete explanation with a dumbfounded stare. It took them a few moments to shake their heads free of their doubts and begin following her instructions.

“D-Do we really need to do this?”

“Shut up and just do it, idiot! Look, even Teach herself is doing it.”

Liddick continued asking questions, but Miguel silenced him with a shout.

“T-True...”

Though the spearman still seemed unconvinced, he felt that his party member's logic was both solid and believable.

“I'm sure she's doing it for a reason us lower rankers can't even begin to wrap our heads around.”

Sensing that, Miguel appended another convincing argument to the end of his explanation.

“Y-Yeah, you know what, you're probably right. They're even worth Ms. Fran's time, so they're definitely worth ours too!”

Mentioning his lack of knowledge caused Liddick to re-evaluate his stance yet again. Recalling his own faults made him much more willing to accept the unfamiliar exercise despite its purpose still being shrouded in mystery.

“You’re right. I’m sure these movements will lead to some sort of incredible effect!”

Like Miguel, Naria had also decided to abide by Fran’s instructions.

“Yeah, it has to have something to do with why she’s so strong even though she’s really young!”

Miguel took the lack of an explanation as a prompt to begin theorizing why Fran wanted them to stretch.

“That’s true! It might have something to do with making training more efficient.”

The constant reinforcement his party members were feeding him eventually caused Liddick to come up with a more reasoned out answer.

“That has to be it!”

“Damn, do I like the sound of that. It’s getting me hella pumped!”

Naria and Miguel both unhesitatingly latched onto his seemingly logical conclusion.

And surprisingly, despite being overglorified, it wasn’t really that far from being the right answer. Stretching didn’t have the sort of miraculous effect they were expecting, but it did reduce the chance of injury. Hence, it technically did have the potential to allow one to train more efficiently.

“Stretches, taught by Master.”

“Your master, teach?”

“Nn.”

“What kind of person was your master?”

“Amazing. Best master in world. Made me strong.”

“Wow! He sounds really impressive!”

“Master is best.”

Liddick paused to let Fran make a comment before continuing.

“And he was the one that taught you how to stretch? T-”

“See, I called it! This stretching thing’s gotta have some sort drastic effect!”

Feeling validated, Miguel cut Liddick’s comment off with his own.

“Let’s give stretching our all!”

Neither of Fran’s other two apprentices disagreed with Naria’s suggestion.

They were all totally gung ho about it, and because of that, started off by trying to force their bodies as far as they could. Fortunately, Fran, who’d realized they misunderstood the exercise’s purpose, stopped them before they hurt themselves. She patiently continued to instruct them until they started going about stretching the slow but thorough way one was supposed to.

Fran was doing her job as their teacher incredibly well. The three were moved by the fact that she, someone way stronger than them, was willing to carefully instruct them. Their respect for her had been bolstered many times over even though all she’d taught them to do was stretch.

“Next, sparring.”

“Eh?”

“Seriously?”

“W-Who will we have to go up against?”

Naria, Miguel, and Liddick reacted in that order. The first leaked a sound to represent dumbfounded surprise, the second proclaimed his disbelief, and the third ended up asking a question in hopes of a favourable response.

Even just considering the possibility of sparring with Fran had caused the colour to

visibly drain from all three of the trio's faces. They clearly remembered getting totally creamed by her just the other day.

None of them wanted to fight her. They all hoped that she would have them spar with one another instead.

A hope she mercilessly crushed.

"Nn. Me, one by one."

"...Alright."

Resigning himself to death, Liddick nodded and acknowledged the idea.

"I can let you go first if you want."

"Nah, you can go right ahead, Miguel."

"Sorry Naria, but I'm with Miguel. Ladies first, you see."

"Damn you Liddick, you traitor!"

Fran was getting tired of seeing the trio's pitiful argument, so she raised one of her arms and pointed in Miguel's direction.

"Swordsman first."

"S-Seriously...?"

"Hurry up."

"G-Got it, Teach."

"Do your beeeest."

"Don't die out there bro."

"O-Oh shut up! You two are going to be following me straight to hell in a few seconds anyways."

Miguel stepped up, his face dyed in a shade of hopelessness.

“You attack.”

“H-Here I go then! Oraaaaaahhhh!”

Miguel came right at Fran with his sword in motion. There wasn't even the slightest bit of hesitation in his movements; he swung to kill because he knew just how much stronger than him she really was.

The nearby sailors, however, didn't. All they saw was a hulk of a man viciously lunging at a little girl with his greatsword in hand. Not all of them had watched yesterday's battle unfold, so most judged based off of appearances and assumed that Miguel was way stronger than Fran.

They'd found the sight of her teaching him, the thing they'd been watching up until now, entertaining and humorous. That was precisely why the sudden change in activity had caused them to start screaming in panic.

But their concerns were needless. The tragic event they'd expected to see simply never happened.

“Wind-up too big.”

“Toryaaah!”

“Power important, but no point if can't hit.”

“Shiiit!”

“Smaller swings.”

“Haaaah!”

“Too rushed.”

“Grgghhh!”

Fran basically didn't bother retaliating. She instead spent her time dodging while giving him advice. She would also lightly tap him whenever he exposed an opening in

order to show him what he needed to work on.

Watching the two caused the sailors to freeze up; they were completely dumbfounded.

As far as Miguel was concerned, however, things were going roughly as expected. The only thing he didn't account for was that Fran wasn't actually going to retaliate. He was glad to see that she continued instructing him as opposed to just totally wrecking him.

He ended up sinking to the floor completely exhausted after maintaining his all out assault for approximately 10 minutes.

"Nn. Last attack, not bad."

"T-Thank you very much!"

"Next, spearman."

"Sure thing!"

Liddick took Miguel's place and began a second vigorous assault on Fran. He tried to strategically angle and shift his attacks such that they'd hit, but she totally saw through all of his tactics and maintained a flawless defense.

"Thinking too much before attacking."

"Kuh!"

"Too easy to read. More variation."

"Haaah!"

"Not bad, but too slow."

She more or less treated him the same way she treated Miguel. She dodged all his attacks and occasionally pressed her palm against his body to demonstrate that he'd made a mistake that would've lead to his death. In the end, Liddick, like Miguel, ended up collapsing out of sheer exhaustion.

Last up was Naria. Firing projectiles from a bow was quite dangerous given that we were on a ship with a bunch of people on it, and Fran wasn't really able to offer too

much bow-related advice in the first place. Hence, she instead focused on teaching Naria how to use her short sword.

Her methods remained the same, but she made sure to attack a bit more frequently since she wanted Naria to get more used to blocking than anything else.

“More attention to blocking. Less to attacking.”

“Got it!”

“Dodge if can’t block.”

“Ow!”

“Use dagger for control. Feints.”

Naria ended up yielding a bit faster than Miguel and Liddick. I didn’t really blame her. She was using a weapon she wasn’t used to, and the need to block Fran’s strikes had drained her of her energy really quickly.

But either way, Fran was satisfied. She’d proven herself capable of functioning as a teacher.

“Archer, keep practicing with short sword.”

“Got it!”

“Swordsman, spearman, focus on offensive footwork.”

The three nodded after Fran gave them some feedback. She’d successfully managed to root out their weaknesses.

“Archer, can also keep practicing with bow.”

But despite that, she continued to call them by their weapons as opposed to their names, and not because that was just how she wanted to refer to them. It was instead something that needed to be attributed to one of her bad habits: forgetting everything she wasn’t really interested in. In other words, although she was interested in having them as her apprentices, she hadn’t actually taken to any of the three individuals themselves. I couldn’t help but wonder whether or not any of them would be able to

get her to remember them by name before the Algieba reached its destination.

Chapter 253

The Water Dragon Warship

Two days had passed since Fran had sunk the five incoming pirate ships. It was currently around noon, the sun was shining directly overhead.

Fran was doing the same thing she'd been doing most of yesterday: training her apprentices. She made them stretch, sparred with them, and showed them how to move. The training itself was going well, but it was cut short by an interruption nonetheless.

The alarm bell began ringing during one of the group's cooldown sessions; its clangs sounded off over and over in a fourfold pattern.

We'd once again found ourselves subject to a pirate assault.

"L-Let's go teach!"

"Shit, pirates again!? Why the hell are there so many? Isn't this supposed to be the Kraken's Nest?"

Both melee ranged fighters, Liddick and Miguel voiced their opinions in that order the moment they heard the bell. The former suggested immediately jumping into the fray, whereas the latter groaned and complained.

"They might be a part of some sort of huge pirate brigade, the kind that can get its hands on brand new, state of the art ships capable of easily outrunning kraken."

Liddick spoke up yet again. Unlike his immediate reaction, which seemed to function as a call to action, his second set of words seemed to contain a bit more thought.

"You serious man? We might be in some deep shit then."

"Stop panicking Miguel. We've got Ms. Fran, our teacher, here with us. How's a pirate ship even supposed to begin to compare?"

“R-Right. Good point, Naria.”

Fran had her apprentices to stand by before heading over to the ship’s bow. There, she found Captain Jerome already gazing at the incoming pirates through a telescope.

“How many?”

“I was just thinking it was about time for you to show up. They’ve got 12 this time ‘round. There seem to be a couple bigger ships mixed in amongst their ranks too.”

12? Damn, that’s pretty big for a band of pirates.

“They’re waving the same flag as the five you sank a couple days back.”

“Their friends?”

“Seems like it. They’ve probably got their HQ somewhere in the area.”

“Sent main force?”

“Sorry princess, but no idea.”

At first, Fran and I had both thought that 12 was a pretty big number, but according to Jerome, it wasn’t. Pirate fleets could get big, really big. The ones we were up against were, relatively speaking, so few in number that the captain couldn’t actually figure out whether they were some small-time group’s main fleet or a larger group’s scouting party.

“The one thing I do know is that somethin’ feels off.”

“Meaning?”

“No idea. I’ve just got a bad feelin’ is all.”

“Want to see enemies.”

“Right. I’ll let ya borrow this then.”

“Nn. Thanks”

Jerome handed Fran a spare telescope. She promptly picked it up, lifted it to her face, and joined him in gazing at the pirate fleet.

[You see anything?]

“Nn... That, weird-looking?”

[Uh, you’re asking me? I was asking you cause I can’t see shit...]

“So not even you know what that is, Black Lightning Princess?”

“Nn.”

The sight of a really buff dude standing next to a little girl, with the two both speaking in low, guttural tones, was one I couldn’t help but find comical. Seeing them side by side made me want to burst into laughter.

“Oh!?”

“What?”

“Look at that ship over there.”

Jerome seemed to have noticed something.

[Is he maybe talking about the ship’s flag, Fran?]

“Nn? Weird flag above skull and crossbone flag.”

[Isn’t that just some sort of pirate flag?]

“Strange insignia. Draconic.”

Well, it probably wasn’t a pirate’s flag if it looked draconic.

“That’s... the Sheedran flag. Shit, I knew it!”

Jerome seemed to have figured something out, as, though he still had the telescope to his eye, he’d started to groan in displeasure.

“Well, I’ve figured out why I felt so on edge.”

“Why?”

“That draconic mark you saw? It’s a sign that the ship’s from Sheedran, one of the maritime nations to our north.”

We didn’t really know much about Sheedran, so we had Jerome elaborate a bit further. According to him, it was an oceanic country whose borders spanned the archipelago with whom it shared its name.

The continent we just departed, Gilbard, had Chrom to its west and Brohdinn to its north. All you needed to do to find the Sheedran islands on a map was to mark the three continents, connect the dots to form a triangle, and find the centerpoint. Visualizing that allowed me to realize that it lay just south west of the demonic sea, the expanse of water between Gilbard and Brohdinn. Taking our current position into account, we’d probably actually be able to reach it if we headed straight north.

Wait, they’ve got a country’s flag hoisted? Does that mean they’re not actually pirates?

It turned out the whole situation was much more convoluted than I’d initially suspected.

“Y’see, thing is, Sheedran’s status as a country is something that people like arguing about. The place was originally occupied by a group of notorious outlaws called the Sheedran Pirates. They were successful, so successful that they managed to absorb basically every other pirate band in the area. Before long, they started calling themselves a country instead of just a group of criminals. Probably shouldn’t really think about that part of it though. We ain’t got no time here to talk politics. All that really matters is the gist. We’ll be golden so long as you know that that the Sheedran people descend from pirate folk, meanin’ they like to be rough. I’ve even heard rumours sayin’ that their entire population’s made up of sailors.”

As far as Sheedran’s citizens were concerned, the strong and charismatic belonged in society’s upper rungs. The country’s former king was especially outstanding. He had been so charismatic that he got every single one of the country’s citizens to acknowledge him, and then some. Even people like Jerome looked up to him, and that was seriously saying something.

“The king was a hell of a man, but no one lives forever. He kicked the bucket a few

years back. His successors jumped right into fightin' over his seat the moment he left it. Ended up throwing one hell of a shitshow."

The flag fluttering about above the pirate flag indicated that the vessel belonged to Sheedran's royal family.

"Then, Sheedran's navy?"

"Not even Sheedran's navy would be brazen enough to fly a pirate's flag. You see how the royal flag's blue? That's apparently s'posed to mean that it belongs to the first prince, the guy that lost the power struggle and got his ass kicked outta the country."

The first prince took his men and started playing pirate after leaving his country. As Sheedran's royals had descended from pirates in the first place, it would technically be more accurate to say that he returned to his roots.

I wasn't quite convinced that we could really conclude that much from just a flag. It could've just been a fake. I didn't need to think too deeply to think up more reasons why that'd be than I could count. Besides, why would someone that's gotten their ass deported want to raise their old country's flag in the first place?

I had Fran express my doubts, but they were shot down. According to Jerome the flag was probably authentic, and the ship most likely bore some sort of connection with Sheedran's royal family.

"Why?"

"Try lookin' at the ship's bow."

"Bow?"

[You see anything, Fran?]

"Nn... Chains?"

"Right. They're hooked up to a water dragon. Water dragon warships like that one were the whole reason the Sheedran were so powerful at sea."

The concept of taming magic beasts and using them to pull seafaring vessels had been around for as long as people could remember, but Sheedran's first king was the one

and only person to have ever succeeded in taming B ranked magic beasts, water dragons.

“There were only ever four of them, but those four alone gave the Sheedran enough power to plow through every other group of pirates and topple even the fleets sent by the most powerful of countries.”

Water dragon pulled ships were truly terrifying; they totally eclipsed regular ships in terms of both speed and firepower and dominated any battlefields they were sent to. Mentioning their traits and specialities caused Jerome to realize why he'd felt something was wrong. It was the speed. The water dragon ships were closing in on us as quickly as would speedboats.

“They’ve probably got the flag raised either cause they want to assert themselves, or ‘cause they want to intimidate anyone they come across.”

The act of self-assertion sounded really stupid and reckless, but not too unlikely based on what Jerome had told us. After all, the prince had already gone as far as causing a shitstorm inside his own country despite his responsibilities.

“Dealing with ‘em isn’t something we’d want to do, but they’ve got too much speed on us for us to get away.”

“Won’t fight?”

“Hell no, not against a Water Dragon Ship. Shit’s worth a whole fleet 100 strong.”

“But can’t escape.”

“Yeah, we’re shit out of luck. Damn it! Why the fuck did we have to run into that monster of a ship!?”

It looked like we weren’t going to be able to retreat.

“The Sheedrans hate our country, so I doubt we’d be able to get away with losing only the usual 30 percent of our cargo either...”

Many of the less extreme pirates were willing to let you go scot-free so long as you were willing to pay a toll fee. The ones attacking us, however, had a Water Dragon Warship. They could care less about making an enemy out of a country. It was possible

that they'd slaughter everyone on board even if we surrendered immediately.

"Fuck it. Our only hope is ramming their flagship head on and engaging in an all out melee. They've got too many cannons for us to stand a chance at range. Time for you adventurers to earn your keep! Think yer up for it?"

I didn't understand why the captain felt that engaging in melee combat was better than letting Fran do the thing she'd done last time. Logically speaking, that seemed like it'd be the way better choice.

"You'll be up against a water dragon, y'know? That shit's dangerous up close."

"Can just attack from ship."

Though water dragons were B ranked threats, it was rather unlikely for them to be capable of sniping us out of the air. All we had to do was find a few openings, and we'd be able to sink the dragon ship alongside all its escorts.

I couldn't say for sure whether or not we'd be able to take the water dragon itself down, but destroying the ship it pulled would honestly be a pretty easy task.

"I like the idea, but it doesn't get us out of the bind we're in. The water dragons could start going berserk if freed. We'd sink for sure if they attacked us."

The only people that knew how to calm down a raging water dragon were Sheedran's higher ups.

"Hmmm."

To be honest, I was at a loss. I had no idea what to do.

[We still have a bit of time to figure things out before we actually have to engage them in combat. What do you say to asking Mordred what he thinks?]

"Nn. Got it."

The most optimal solution would be for us to totally wipe the pirates out, water dragon and all. Our biggest blocker was that we weren't sure we'd actually be able to kill the dragon in question. We'd never fought any sort of dragon before, so we didn't have a frame of reference we could use to figure out our chances. To that end, we

needed to keep ourselves on guard, just in case.

Chapter 254

The Water Dragon Warship's True Power

Fran and a few others, Mordred included, gathered to discuss the plan going forward immediately after we confirmed that we were going up against a Water Dragon Warship.

“So, just to double check, you said you could wipe out all the ships escorting their flagship?”

“Nn. Leave to me.”

“I guess that means the only thing we’ll have to worry about will be the Water Dragon Warship...”

It turned out that not even Mordred had any experience fighting water dragons.

“So you remember how you won against Fermus...? I think you’d be able to take the water dragon down if you used that again. Do you think that’s something you can pull off, or does it need some sort of condition you can’t fulfill right now?”

“Can use.”

“Great. In that case, all we’ll have to do is come up with a contingency in the case that it manages to survive it.”

The ship was sure to get totally wrecked if we launched both Kanna Kamui and Black Lightning Advent at the dragon. It would undoubtedly be set free if we failed to take it down. To prevent that exact situation from unfolding, we needed a more reliable way to damage the dragon, a method of attack that was both precise and extremely high in terms of power.

(Telekinetic Catapult?)

[You were thinking that too?]

(Nn. Only option.)

Taking down the water dragon attached to the ship didn't seem like it'd be too difficult. In fact, it was probably way easier than taking down a wild water dragon. The chains that held the creature to the seaborne chariot it pulled greatly limited its range of movement.

Hitting was going to be fairly simple. All we had to worry about was doing enough damage to kill it through all its defenses—which I figured wouldn't be too hard so long as we hit one of its vitals.

"What if only attacked dragon?"

"That is probably the most ideal solution... but do you know of any ways to implement it?"

"Nn."

"Then I guess we'll have to leave that to you too. God, I feel pathetic."

Mordred's inability to act vexed him. He'd basically no choice but to have Fran, an adventurer way younger than he was, resolve everything all on her own. Worse yet, he wasn't being limited because he was weak, but rather, because he lacked the precise skill set needed to make a difference. His speciality, lava magic, was short ranged, but it could provide the ship with excellent defenses, but a focus on defense wasn't exactly what we needed at the moment.

A completely different thought crossed my mind as I contemplated Mordred's capabilities. The ship we were about to attack was one that did technically have a member of a royal family on board. Was killing their dragon and sinking flagship potentially going to lead to some sort of international outcry?

"Okay to sink enemy?"

"What do you mean?"

"Will country retaliate if prince dies?"

"Hahaha, no worries there. The vessel's flying a pirate flag, so sinking it is only the most natural course of action even if it does belong to Sheedran's navy. If anything,

we'd be under more scrutiny if we didn't."

"A pirate flag's basically a threat in and of itself, basically means "hand over your shit or die," y'know? As far as we seafarers go, attackin' anyone with a pirate's flag is just common sense."

His argument made sense to me, so we moved on to the next problem: figuring out the order in which we'd sink the ships. We had to choose between focusing on either the flagship or its escorts. Though the options seemed quite different, they resulted in the creation of a similar set of disadvantages. The water dragon warship was likely going to chase the Algieba down if we took down the escorts first. Likewise, targeting the flagship could lead to the rest of its fleet hunting the Algieba down. Making a decision would've been a much simpler task if we were capable of providing time estimates and whatnot, but we honestly had no idea how long we would need to actually beat the dragon.

Jerome ended up solving that problem for us by pointing out that the other ships would likely run the hell away if we took their flagship down, meaning we'd save on the number of things we had to fight if we got our priorities straight.

"They'd probably find it totally suicidal to go up against something that managed to take a Water Dragon Warship down, y'see."



We found ourselves launching off the ship's deck once the meeting adjourned.

[Urushi, focus on dodging.]

"Woof!"

[Fran, try to aggro the dragon. Make it raise its head out of the water if you can.]

"Got it."

It would be much more difficult for us to finish the dragon off if it stayed underwater. The dragon itself didn't gain any bonuses from being submerged, but it would still naturally be protected by the seawater around it. Water was much denser than air, and we lacked anything specialized for subaqueous combat. The vast majority of our

attacks would simply end up losing force below the ocean's surface.

To that end, I asked Fran to barrage the dragon with weaker spells in an attempt to annoy it enough to lure it out where we could hit it harder.

Arrows, cannonballs, and even spells would periodically fire from the ship. But Urushi, swift as he was, avoided them all with ease. The ratio of spells to other projectiles was surprisingly high, and indicated that there were multiple mages on board the ship. That same statistic further served to indicate that the people on board really weren't just your typical pirates.

As they posed no threat, Fran ignored the incoming attacks and just continued to single mindedly throw spells at the water dragon. She didn't actually seem to be hurting it, but that didn't mean it wasn't getting annoyed.

All it took was five short minutes worth of pestering for the lizard-like beast to emerge from the water, its face adorned with an expression of rage.

To me, the term water dragon suggested something along the lines of a plesiosaurus, a big, underwater creature with flippers on its sides and smooth, slippery skin.

Clearly, I was wrong, or least mostly wrong. The only accurate part of my guess had been the general plesiosaurus-like shape. Unlike a plesiosaurus, however, it was covered in from head to toe with rugged scales, and even had a sharp horn growing out of its forehead. Its rear was decorated by an abnormally long tail, and its back a pair of fins resembling degenerated wings. Likewise, its arms and legs were also part fin, and bore a strong resemblance to a sea lion's front two limbs. The way they were shaped led me to suspect that the water dragons would probably still be capable of moving around even on land.

The whole creature's body was covered in a layer of what appeared to be seawater. It'd appeared to have wrapped itself up in moisture in order to prevent its skin from dehydrating.

"Master!"

There was no point in thinking about what the dragon was doing or why it looked the way it did. All that could be saved for after we defeated it.

[Yeah, let's do it!]

Fran brandished me and pulled me into position. I'd finished all my preparations ahead of time; I was already ready.

"Haaaah!"

[Fuuuck yeaaaah!]

I boosted myself with Telekinesis and charged towards the dragon's head the moment Fran threw me. Despite being a B ranked threat, it was incapable of reacting given the combination of my speed and the lack of distance between us. Both my aim and our setup had been perfect. I smashed into the water dragon's unprotected face.

"Oryyyywaaat!?"

A deafening sound echoed throughout my surroundings, but it was neither the sound of the water dragon's head exploding, nor the sound of a new hole opening up in its skull.

It'd instead been the sound of me popping the membrane surrounding the dragon's body. And that was it. There'd been a sort of magical barrier underneath the layer of seawater. The combination of the two defensive walls had killed all my momentum and minimized the amount of damage I'd actually been able to inflict.

My telekinetic catapult had only managed a scratch. We'd thought that just one hit would be enough to take our foe down, but at this rate, it almost looked as if the dragon would be totally fine even after a couple hundred.

[Well, then how about trying this on for size? Lightning Blast!]

I cast the spell I'd gotten from leveling Lightning Magic up to level 5, Lightning Blast. Though it was rather short ranged, it more than made up for it with its high damage output. I'd assumed that using it would be a good idea because water-aligned life forms seemed like they'd probably be weak to electricity.

[Your defenses won't block shit if I attack you from point blank!]

Electrical energy zapped through the water dragon's head; there was so much of it that it even ended up illuminating our surroundings. But despite that, the water dragon took no damage whatsoever.

I didn't understand what'd happened.

It didn't have any skills that let it resist lightning.

“Groooooooooooooohhhhh!”

[Fuck!]

It seemed that the water dragon was about to try and bite me, so I quickly teleported back into Fran's hands.

“Okay?”

[I only just made it out, but yeah, I'm fine. But shit, that thing's defenses are rock solid. It's got a magical barrier, a layer of seawater, and its scales all working in tandem to protect it. It basically didn't take damage from Telekinetic Catapult. It didn't seem to take any damage from my lightning magic either.]

I knew we were going up against a B ranked magic beast, but I honestly hadn't expected it to remain perfectly unscathed even after taking several attacks head on.

“Understood something by watching from afar.”

[What?]

“Ship supplying magic to water dragon.”

[Oh...? Yeah, I didn't notice.]

“Biggest mana flow when Master used magic.”

[Wait, so that means the ship has something that it can use to boost the dragon's defense!?!]

The moment I considered the existence of such a device was the moment I realized I should've been expecting it, or something like it, from the very start. Skilled mages and adventurers were difficult to come by, but there were still quite a decent number of them out there. Some sort of dragon-protecting countermeasure should've been par for the course.

Their ship was big, big enough for it to be carrying a whole boatload's worth of magical apparatuses. Moreover, it was a flagship that used to belong to a country that basically dominated every single major power out there in terms of its ability to do naval combat. Magical items with ridiculously powerful, unimaginable effects should've been one of the things we'd expected from them from the very start.

[Well, this is a huge pain in the ass if I've ever seen one. We can't kill the water dragon unless we blow the ship up, but that stupid oversized lizard's probably going to go on rampage the moment we let it loose...]

"Destroy ship first, hunt dragon after?"

[I dunno, that sounds like it could be pretty risky.]

We'd be forced into a pretty tough spot if the dragon decided to dive the moment it was freed. I highly doubted we'd be able to chase it and defeat it if it did. It wouldn't pose too much of a problem if it decided to flee, but, it'd be a huge pain in the ass to deal with if it decided it wanted revenge, and started attacking from the depths. We'd have literally no way of dealing with it.

"Will dragon want revenge?"

[Dunno. It's a B ranked magic beast, so chances are, it's probably at least as smart as Urushi.]

And anything that smart was more than capable of wanting revenge.

"Understood. Troublesome."

[Yeah, it looks like we've pretty much got no choice but to board them.]

I had no idea how they were actually retaining control over the water dragon, but I suspected it was likely either through a tamer or some sort of magic item. Either way, we'd probably be able to figure it out and deal with whatever it was if we managed to bring the fight to the enemy flagship.

[We're pretty much out of options, so let's head back to the Algieba for now.]

We wouldn't be able to comb through the entire ship on our own. It was way too big. We were going to need more hands on deck if we actually wanted to get much of

anywhere at all.

Chapter 255

The Start of a Melee

Fran wholeheartedly apologized to Jerome, Mordred, and everyone else that'd placed their faith in her as soon as she got back on the Algieba. Honestly, I wanted to do the same. I was the one that'd kept going on and on about how we'd be able to pull it off, but the Water Dragon Ship had made me totally eat my words. I felt really bad about the fact that Fran had ended up apologizing in my stead.

God damn it, Water Dragon Ship! I swear I'll sink your ass for this!

I'd expected everyone to get mad at us and start yelling at us, but much to my surprise, none of them did.

"So you attacked the water dragon the same way you attacked the pirate ships we ran into the other day?"

"Nn."

"If it won't take any damage from an attack strong enough to sink a ship in one blow, then we can't really blame you."

Luckily for us, they were able to understand our circumstances.

"Looks like our only hope at winning this would be to board their flagship and take out whatever or whoever's controlling the dragon."

"Sounds 'bout right."

The captain nodded as he thought over Mordred's suggestion.

"Knowledge of control method?"

"None here. What about you, captain?"

"I ain't got any details, but I know the royal family's been handling them for ages."

“Then, capture royalty?”

“Seems like a pretty good idea. We might be able to figure how to stop the damn dragon if we do. Or maybe, if we’re lucky, we might even figure out how we can steal it from ‘em, ship and all.”

“Okay.”

We’d be able to bring the Beastkin’s Country a nice fancy souvenir. That said, figuring that part out was just a stretch goal. For now, our main focus was going to be stopping the Water Dragon Warship from doing its thing.

“Only problem is we have no idea how to get on board the ship. Far as I know, our only shot at it would be to ram ‘em somehow.”

“Can leave to me.”

“You’ve got something figured out already, princess?”

“Nn. Can move everyone to enemy ship instantly.”

It was finally Dimension Gate’s turn to shine.

It would’ve been difficult for us to open up a gate to any place outside the range of our vision, but the Water Dragon Warship had gotten close enough for its deck to be seen with the naked eye. Linking our ship and theirs was an easy task.

Our confidence was greeted by a set of skeptical-looking gazes. Fran had only just failed spectacularly despite talking big, and space/time magic was a super rare element, so most wouldn’t bother suspecting that she could use it.

Realizing that we needed something to back our claim, I had Fran grab the captain’s hat through a super short distance gate.

“Woah! That’s an incredibly advanced spell...!”

“Y’can even use space/time magic? Colour me impressed.”

“That’s our teacher for you!”

Adventurers and sailors alike reacted to our reveal with shock; they began talking amongst each other and making a whole lot of noise.

“So you can use the spell you just cast to get us onto the enemy’s ship?”

The quickest to regain his cool and get back to business was Mordred. We were really lucky to have him and his level head on board.

“Nn. Can connect gate to ship’s deck.”

“I guess that means we should keep this ‘ere ship as far from theirs as we can.”

Likewise, Jerome was also fairly quick to begin contemplating the spell and its implications.

“Nn. No point in boarding enemy if ship sinks.”

“Do you think we’d actually be able to outrun that fleet of theirs, captain? It looks to me like they’re faster than us.”

“Yer right, they’re bound to catch up. The Algieba’s pretty damned solid, but concentrated cannonfire’s sure to put ‘er in danger.”

Protecting our own ship was a must, so we proposed splitting up our forces. Specifically, our idea was to have Mordred lead a group of people aboard the enemy flagship while Fran sank the rest of the fleet as quickly as possible before hurrying over to reinforce him.

It didn’t take long for the plan to be validated as our best option given the current situation.

“Alright boys, let’s raid the enemy ship, kick asses, and take names. Are you ready!?”

Mordred fired the men up as he got to his feet and prepared himself to board the pirate’s flagship.

“““Yessir!”“““

“Fran, if you could.”

“Nn.”

I opened the gate.

With Mordred at the lead, our forces began pouring through and invading the enemy ship. The strategy we’d employed was a sink or swim approach. Either we won, and everything went well, or we got totally fucked. If the ship sank, we were done for, so there was no point staying on board and just waiting around. Thus, literally every single adventurer and sailor we had on board ended up following Mordred over to the enemy’s flagship, Fran’s three merry disciples included.

“It’s time to shine, Teach, so here we go!”

Liddick readied his weapon as he got ready to head through the portal.

“It’s time to show off everything you’ve taught us!”

“We’ll capture the enemy’s commanders for sure! Just watch us!”

Likewise, Miguel and Naria totally pumped themselves the hell up as they awaited their turn to sortie.

“Don’t push selves too hard. Very important, stay alive.”

“““Yes ma’am!”“““

And with that, they left.

Personally, I didn’t really want to see any of the three die for the sole reason that Fran would be sad if they did. Hopefully, they wouldn’t try too hard.

I started to hear screams, mostly pirate screams, leak over from where the gate was connected. There were bound to be a ton of the seafaring ne’er-do-wells on board, but I figured that our allies were rather unlikely to lose given that we had Mordred. Still, it would be in their best interest for us to blow up all the other ships as quickly as possible.

“Time to act.”

[You betcha.]

“Woof!”

“We’re counting on you, princess!”

“Nn!”

We exchanged a few words with Jerome, closed the gate, and leapt into action. Time was of the essence, the longer we took, the more casualties our allies would suffer. Given that, we decided to go full throttle from the very start.

“Master! Ready!”

[On it!]

“Urushi, full speed ahead.”

“Woof!”

I transformed into the anti-ship sword form I’d first adopted a couple days back as Urushi plunged straight towards the enemy ship. Fran raised and swung me the moment we passed it by. The combination of her attack’s power and the additional boost brought about by Urushi’s speed allowed her to cut through it like a hot knife through butter.

A single strike was all it took her to bring my blade from the ship’s front all the way through to its back, bisecting it and sinking it one go. Though he wasn’t able to continue using gravity to his advantage, Urushi refused to slow down. He pumped his legs over and over, bringing her from ship to ship.

Not a single one of the seacraft he passed survived. Each and every single one was torn right in two. The pirates weren’t slow to react, they immediately began bombarding him with their attacks, but to no avail. It simply wasn’t possible for them to hit Urushi at his top speed.

While Urushi and Fran targeted nearby ships, I focused on the ones a bit further away. The might of Thor’s Hammer struck every ship too far outside my companions’ reach.

Urushi managed to maintain his speed for a full 10 minutes, just enough time for us to loop around and sink all the fleet’s vessels, flagship aside.

“Nn. Only Water Dragon Warship left.”

[We were pretty lucky that all the other ships were small enough for us to sink in one hit each.]

“Urushi, go to Water Dragon Warship.”

“Woof!”

All we had to now was stop the Water Dragon Ship before it reached the Algieba. In other words, we probably needed to board the ship and find the former prince.

Fran leapt off Urushi’s back as soon as we arrived, and started cutting down the pirates that happened to be where she landed.

“Haaaaah!”

“Higyaaah!”

“S-Shit, more enemies!”

She loosed an intense aura of bloodlust after dispatching a couple enemies, one powerful enough to stop every nearby pirate in their tracks. I used the time they spent unmoving to quickly appraise them all, but failed to find anyone that seemed noteworthy in our immediate vicinity.

[Hey Fran, you see how, over there, there’s a guy with a huge ass spear? He’s an executive. Same goes for the mage that’s standing right beside him.]

“Only need to capture them?”

[Pretty much. Let’s get rid of everyone else since they’ll probably just get in the way when we interrogate their execs.]

“Nn. Got it.”

Fran nodded before charging into the pirate mob.

“Gyaaaah!!”

“Hiiii!!”

The pirates panicked as she cut her way through them. The moment she joined the fray was the moment they realized they were doomed. She moved so fast they weren't even capable of seeing her, let alone keeping track of her. Every time she did appear, their allies would groan scream as they were slaughtered like lambs. But even then, they still wouldn't even so much as catch a glimpse of her. Their lines of sight were to cluttered by the fountains of blood erupting from their friends' corpses.

Only after murdering another ten or so pirates did she finally pause to issue a threat.

“Choose. Jump overboard or die.”

She spoke in a low, intimidating tone that only those standing right by her could hear, yet, half the pirates present reacted to it and immediately plunged themselves into the sea.

The other half, the remaining half, managed to keep their wits about them and remain on deck despite her threats. I couldn't tell whether their decisions had stemmed from loyalty, or maybe something like their creed as pirates, but either way, they'd chosen to fight. In vain.

“Made choice? Then die.”

Fran stepped forward.

We'd telepathically told all our allies to move behind her; all the people in front of her were pirates.

And so, as she took a second step, she swung me.

I extended my blade and warped my general shape into that of a five meter long katana the moment she moved and activated a sword technique. Though she'd only swung once, the combination of my form and her masterful attack had reaped 20 entire pirates and heavily injured many more.

All the pirates that'd survived the attack fell onto the deck, groaning in pain. Ignoring them, she continued to step forwards, her gaze focused only on the two execs we'd spotted earlier. Neither was able to move. Both stared right back at her, frozen in terror.

...Wait. Why's the guy with the spear got his face all covered in blood?

[So uh... Fran...]

(Nn. Made small mistake.)

Apparently, we'd happened to make a *small* incision on the spearman's forehead. We were pretty damned lucky. We would've accidentally killed him before he told us what we wanted to know had he even been the slightest bit closer. That said, almost getting killed had him totally scared shitless, so in a way, things did kinda end up working out.

"How to control water dragon?"

"O-Oh god!"

"I-I-I-I'll tell you everything I know! P-Please, just don't kill me!"

Chapter 256

Suarez

Fran disarmed the two executives she captured before sitting them down so she could interrogate them.

Her goal was of course to get them to divulge the Water Dragon Warship's secrets.

"How to control dragon?"

"N-No idea."

"Nn?"

"Giiiiiiii!"

One of the execs tried to play dumb, to which Fran reacted by mercilessly stabbing me into his thigh.

"How to control dragon?"

"T-The only ones that can tell you that'll be the boss and the guys right under him!"

"W-We're telling the truth! We're just regular pirates that happened to get raised up through the ranks! They wouldn't tell the likes of us anything!"

"Tell all known information. Even if insignificant."

"I-I'll tell you everything I know, so please, pull your sword out of my leg!"

"Nn."

The pirate that agreed to talk began wailing in a mix of pain and fear as she removed me from his thigh.

His companion, the mage, paled. He realized that he would soon suffer the same fate

as his buddy should he refuse to talk. To that end, the small framed caster immediately began spouting off everything he knew, and even went as far as to elaborate on things without us needing to ask.

Though he really didn't know too many details, he was at least capable of confirming that the dragon simply seemed to obey orders; it wasn't being controlled through some sort of large scale magic item. That said, it would only really ever listen to the prince, the guy the pirates referred to as their boss.

Asking them about exactly how the prince was controlling the dragon failed to lead to any results. They didn't even know whether it just recognized him as someone it should listen to, or if it was being manipulated through some other means. In other words, smaller scaled items, skills, and spells were all possibilities we still had to consider.

The most useful thing we got them to do was tell us a bit about the prince. His name was Suarez Sheedran, and could best be described as a brown-skinned hulk of a man with silver-blond hair adorning his head. Suarez was well versed in combat; the average adventurer supposedly wouldn't be able to match him. His main weapon was a massive battleaxe, one he was likely to be carrying around right this moment. Capturing him sounded like it was going to be much easier said than done.

Of course, we also managed to get them to talk about the magical device they were using to strengthen the dragon. Apparently it was quite large, and near the ship's rear, but as the part of the ship holding it was cut off from the rest, we wouldn't be able to find it if we just walked around.

Annoyingly enough, neither of the two we captured knew how to get into the cut off section. In fact, they were both oblivious to its precise location. This, of course, stemmed from the fact that the prince didn't trust them. They, unlike many other executives, hadn't started off as his followers. They were instead just the former top brass of the pirate brigades that used to occupy the area prior to the prince's arrival. Though he did trust them enough to allow them to keep their positions, the prince basically never let them in on anything too important.

"W-We've told you everything you asked for!"

"S-So please, don't kill us...!"

“Got it.”

“T-Thank you so mguraaaaghh!”

Fran kicked the mage right in the face. The sheer force of the strike sent him spiraling off the ship’s deck.

“D-Didn’t you say you wouldn’t kill us if w-we told you what you wanted!?”

The spearman screamed indignantly as he watched his friend plunge into the sea.

“Didn’t kill. Just dumped in sea because in the way.”

“W-What the fuck is that suppraaaaghghhhh!”

She wasn’t wrong. Fran hadn’t actually killed either of the two men. Instead, she’d just knocked them overboard while also depriving them of their consciousness. Though it was rather likely that they’d die, they could still live if they were lucky, so it would be more accurate to chalk their deaths up to their own inability wake as opposed to attributing them to her. Besides, they were pirates, *professional* seafaring pests. As far as I was concerned, they were sure to survive.

“Damn Teach, you’re totally merciless!”

“I really love that part of her.”

“It looks like we should take after her example and start doing stuff like that too.”

Fran’s apprentices threw in a few comments as they watched the second man follow the first into the sea. The first two, Miguel and Naria, seemed impressed, whereas the third, Liddick, began making note of her behaviour. Realizing that they’d been watching led me to contemplate whether or not they would benefit from imitating her merciless tendencies. My first instinct was to refute the thought, but then I considered the possibility that they might one day get stabbed in the back and die because they sympathized with a foe. From that, I determined that Fran’s approach would probably be best for them in the long run. *Probably.*

[A-Anyway, why don’t we go hunt Suarez down?]

“Nn.”

We informed all the other adventurers still on the ship's deck about Suarez so we could have them help us look for him. We hadn't been able to talk to Mordred's party directly, as they'd already started invading the ship's interior, but we attempted to make up for it by asking everyone else to relay the information if they happened to see him.

I had no idea exactly how strong Suarez was, but there was a chance that, Fran aside, Mordred's party would be the only ones capable of dealing with him.

"Urushi, search too."

"Woof!"

All the Algieba's sailors already knew that Urushi was Fran's familiar, so the chance of him getting attacked by one of our allies mid-search was incredibly low.

[Capture him if you can, but come right back if you think he's too strong for you, alright?]

"Woof woof!"

"Start."

With a single word and nothing more, Fran ventured into the ship's interior through the nearest exit.

Our allies had already taken out most of the pirates within, so we were able to look around without any interference—or at least that was how it went until we went down a flight of stairs.

Enemies began attacking us the moment we descended, and continued to do so as we explored. Not a single one of them was anywhere close to being Fran's match, but they were still quite annoying nonetheless.

A dense aura of battlelust began to assault us as we moved a bit further along. It seemed we'd found our mark.

[Fran!]

"Nn!"

Fran traced it to a remarkably large door, which she kicked down to reveal something along the lines of an empty warehouse.

Several adventurers and pirates were facing off against each other in the room's center. The bloodlust Fran had tracked down had originated from the two most powerful people in the room.

One was our ally, Mordred. And naturally, the other was Suarez, the pirate we'd been looking to capture.

The Sheedran prince was honestly quite strong. He had Divine Bow Arts, and several other skills indicated he was obviously an accomplished warrior. But, despite that, I didn't find him to be qualified enough to function as the captain of a pirate ship. He lacked too much in the sailing department for me to really think him a sailor.

Unfortunately, appraising him didn't tell me much about how he was controlling the dragon. None of his skills indicated that he was capable of taming or summoning monsters.

"You're idiots, retards! Did you really think you could defeat a Water Dragon Warship?"

"It's true that your ship is strong, probably the strongest there is, but that doesn't mean shit if we can just take the people aboard it."

"Gyahahaha! Nice joke! I'll torture you even more than all my usual prey before feeding you to the fishes!"

So he likes torturing the people he captures? That's pretty low...

The two combatants engaged as I pondered the prince's distasteful hobbies.

"Dorryaaaahhhh!"

Suarez swung his battleaxe straight at the crown of Mordred's head. His attack had quite the speed to it; he looked to be at least as strong as a C ranked adventurer.

But despite that, we weren't even the slightest bit concerned.

"Too slow."

“Kuh! How impertinent!”

Mordred received the blow head on with his spear and cleanly parried it—a move which appeared well within Suarez’ calculations. The axe-wielder didn’t let the resulting impact throw him off balance. He promptly twisted the weapon around and brought it back for a second slash. I had to admit, the technique was skillful, and it would’ve been more than enough for him to take down the average adventurer.

But Mordred was no average adventurer.

“Metal Control”

“W-What the!?”

“Your axe is mine. It’s already fallen under my control.”

At a glance, it almost looked as if Mordred had stuck his right arm up out of desperation after realizing that he couldn’t block the attack, but of course, that wasn’t the case.

The massive axe that had seemed to be on course to sever Mordred’s arm bent out of shape the moment it was about to make contact. It almost looked like the battleaxe had actually been made out of clay and not steel.

Though Suarez had already basically lost, Mordred didn’t let up. He assured his victory by manipulating the axe’s metal and wrapping it around Suarez’ body. The way it coiled around its former wielder had almost made it appear like some sort of living creature.

Mordred’s actions had demonstrated why Lava Magic was so fearsome. It allowed its wielder to take control of and freely manipulate metal-based substances.

“Shit! What just happened!?”

Suarez’ axe, or rather, his newfound fetters, had already returned to a hardened state. The prince tried to break free, but soon found himself unable escape his restraints. The steel hadn’t just been melted down and reshaped. It’d also be strengthened.

“Guooooooooohhhhh! Release me, damn it!”

“Stop struggling. It won’t be possible for someone as weak as you to escape.”

And with that, the prince was made our prisoner.

Chapter 257

A Discussion with Suarez

“Y-Your Highness!”

“Shit! Damn you! Let our boss go!”

The prince’s many subordinates immediately began kicking up a fuss the moment they realized he’d been captured.

“In the way.”

“Gyaaaah!”

“Guaaaahh!”

But Fran butt into the conflict and cut them down before they could so much as make a move.

“So how did the whole pirate ship thing end up going, Fran?”

“Sank all but this one.”

“That was quick. Nice job.”

“You too. Captured captain.”

“I was just lucky. But enough of that, let’s save singing each other praises for later, shall we? We’ve got a bit of an interrogation to get out of the way first.”

“Nn.”

Suarez still had quite a bit of fight in him. His expression was fierce, and expressed that he wasn’t willing to give up. That wasn’t to say, however, that he wasn’t intimidated. He twitched a bit, as if daunted, when Fran and Mordred approached him.

“Release me, you mongrel!”

“Why?”

“Insolent! Do you not know who I am!?”

“Let me guess. A guy that leads a group of criminal scum?”

“Filth, causes problems by being alive?”

“The lot of you are all ignorant fools! I am a man of great importance, Sheedran’s king!”

“Mhm. I’m sure you are.”

“How dare you!”

Mordred, being the total badass he was, ignored Suarez’ shouts. He instead lifted a foot and started grinding it into the prince’s face—an action that Fran soon began to imitate.

“Cease that immediately! I will allow you to acknowledge me as your lord, and yourselves as my retainers if you immediately prostrate yourselves before me and apologize!”

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. There had to be something wrong with the prince’s head. He seemed to think that his offer would entice his assailants despite the fact that they’d already defeated him and tied him up.

And he meant it. The expression on his face demonstrated that the offer was as serious as could be.

“I am one of Sheedran’s royals, a lord that commands water dragons. All you have to do is the natural act of licking my shoes. Do that, and I’ll treat you no different from any other in my service.”

There was no way the prince was simply bad at reading the mood, he must’ve had some sort of communication disorder or something. I was surprised he lived as long as he did, and I also now fully understood why he’d gotten ripped off the throne and deported.

Still, I could see why the pirates had taken his side. His lack of brain cells was a pretty major issue if you asked me, but he was still strong, and did still have control over a Water Dragon Warship. To them, his threats held plenty of weight; he could easily annihilate them if they failed to yield. Moreover, serving him wasn't without its merits. There were clearly many payouts, of both the immediate and potential future variety. Besides, I highly doubted he'd gotten himself captured by them before starting to negotiate. Given all the aforementioned circumstances, their allegiance to him was almost a given.

That said, neither Fran nor Mordred had bothered caring even the slightest bit for what he had to say. They ignored everything he had to say and immediately began interrogating him.

"Tell everything about controlling water dragons."

"We won't hurt you if you tell us what we want to know."

"What!? Why would I tell you anything!?"

The prince refused to talk. I couldn't tell if he was demonstrating a royal's pride, a pirate's obstinacy, or the simple fact that he couldn't read the mood. But either way, he shut his mouth and turned his face away from his interrogators.

"Fmph."

"Guaaahh! The paiiin!"

Fed up, Fran once again jammed her foot into Suarez' face and started to grind down on it even harder than she had the first time.

"Cease that immediately, woman!"

Though many would rejoice from having Fran step on them, to the non-masochistic, it was merely a sort of humiliating torture.

"Last chance. Explain controlling water dragons."

Fran's gaze went cold. She started emitting a heavy aura of bloodlust as she looked down upon the prince. It was powerful enough to make the average person shit their pants. Still, the prince managed to both retain his wits and return her glare as he

continued to complain.

“Stop going on and on about that and release me!”

A foolish move.

“Got it.”

“Good. Finally, you understand. Now hurry up and undo these res-”

“Got that you won’t talk yet.”

“Gyaaaaah!”

“Heal. Next, feet.”

“S-Stop! Cease that immediately!”

“Say please.”

“H-How dare you ask that of s-”

“Fmph.”

“Gyaaaaaaaaah!”

Fran continued to violently thrust me into his body and casting heal to make up for the hp he lost. At first, Suarez refused to talk. He resisted until the situation repeated itself five times over. Only then did he finally realize that he was unable to appeal to her through the use of his authority.

“P-Please stop! N-N-No more!”

He started to beg her, his face dyed in terror.

“Explain controlling water dragons. Will stab if you say anything else.”

Though we didn’t really care for his pleas, we did stop so we could repeat our demands.

“Fine! I’ll tell you! So stop, cease your acts of viole-”

Stab

“Giiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii!”

“Heal.”

“Aarrrrrgghhhh! Stop iiiit!”

“Said to only explain controlling water dragons.”

“I-I understand! The water dragons are bound by contract to obey any orders made by anyone with Sheedran’s first king’s blood flowing through their veins. That’s why they’ll listen to whatever I say!”

And so, the prince began to speak. Fran threatened him every single time he hesitated by brandishing me, whereas Mordred played more of a good cop kind of role and spoke to him almost sympathetically. The combination of these two methods allowed us to draw everything we wanted out of him. Unfortunately, dealing with him was still a pain in the ass. He would start getting all cocky and shit every single time anyone softened even the slightest bit, so Fran had ended up grinding me against his thighs upwards of 30 times throughout the process. I almost felt like we’d gone a bit overboard, but it honestly couldn’t be helped. He simply just never learned his lesson.

His abnormally strong willed and ridiculous sense of pride honestly impressed me. Literally anyone else would’ve long broken into tears and become obedient. He, on the other hand, somehow managed to regain his defiance every other time he opened his mouth.

Still, we’d made him bend enough to learn what we’d wanted. The water dragons weren’t being manipulated through the use of some sort of magic item. Their obedience to him stemmed from the first King of Sheedran’s ability to use contract magic.

I was surprised to hear that the dragons the nation used today were the very same ones that they’d had from the very start. Well, sort of. The nation had started off with seven dragons. Three had fallen in battle; only four remained.

The dragons weren’t the only thing that left me astonished. The device that was used

to enhance them did the very same. Their boosts weren't unconditional. Bolstering the dragon's defenses came at a cost. Dragons had powerful offenses, and accidentally firing upon one's allies was quite the concern should the dragon fail to aim its attacks precisely. To that end, the device's designers had traded its capacity to autonomously use breath and other similar abilities for a magical barrier alongside greatly increased self healing and stamina. The only way for the dragon to use its long ranged attacks would be for Suarez to order it to do so.

Learning of this gave rise to a pretty big problem. We couldn't destroy the device without putting the Algieba in danger. The moment we blew it up would be the moment the dragon once again became capable of barraging our ship of its own will.

"What do?"

"The best way to handle the situation would probably be to get our friend here to order to dragon to stand down."

"Only option?"

"Yeah. Once we've done that, we can destroy the item boosting its defense before finally slaying it. We should be able to give you a hand with that last part if it's rendered defenseless."

With that decided, Fran, Mordred, and all the other adventurers present lugged Suarez up to the ship's deck. so he could order the dragon not to attack.

"It looks like we won't have any problems stopping the dragon, but destroying the defensive device it uses may need some more thought."

"Leave to me. Can teleport."

"Good point, that sounds like it'd be the best option. I'll leave destroying it up to you then."

"Nn. Then will check on device once first. Easier to teleport to known locations."

We could go back and forth between several locations with ease if we decided to drop a few beacons.

"Then leave that to you."

By “that,” Fran had been referring to Suarez; she’d decided to leave him behind with Mordred.

“Yeah. Be careful.”

“Nn.”

With everything considered and out of the way, Fran set off towards the location Suarez had described to her.

Chapter 258

No Rest For the Weary

Fran and I navigated our way through the ship's interior, only to eventually stop ourselves in front of an average-looking wall. Nothing about it seemed out of the ordinary, but we were confident that it served as the entrance to the room that contained the device bolstering the water dragon's defenses. Suarez gave us a fairly thorough description when we asked him where we needed to go find it.

We investigated the wall by knocking on it a few times and confirmed that the space behind it did indeed seem hollowed out. The prince told us exactly what we needed to do to access the room, and I'd memorized all the necessary steps, but we decided to circumvent the prince's ritual through the use of brute force. The method described to us was far too complex; we simply didn't want to bother with it.

"Fmph."

Fran swung me several times and filled the wall with incisions before giving it a light kick.

The cuts themselves were so clean that they allowed the wooden surface to retain its form, but the force she applied with her foot caused the now-unstable structure to collapse. The first thing we did as we stepped into the room was gaze upon the device within. I couldn't help but immediately think of the thing we saw as the product of eccentricity. I'd only ever seen one other device like it. It was a technological oddity, one made from the union of magic and machinery, a pair of clashing concepts.

The magical part, the device's core, was comprised of two smaller pieces: a giant crystal, and the sculpture that supported it. Though the crystal shone like a jewel, my eyes were more drawn to its base, a delicately crafted carving seemingly made out of bone.

The mechanical part, the device's shell, was installed to enclose both the crystalline core and the support that held it in place. Its shape almost seemed to resemble that of a sports car's engine; metallic pipes protruded from it like mufflers.

All in all, the strange device looked like it came out of a game that mixed steampunk elements with more fantastical ones. In other words, it appeared to be the type of device one would discover in F*inal F*antasy, as opposed to something one would stumble across while playing Dr*gon Qu*st. Like the Algieba's propulsion device, it reminded me very much of heavy machinery even though I knew its functions were derived from a set of magical principles as opposed to the laws of physics.

"Mmph." Fran grunted as she felt a sudden wave of magical energy pulse through her body.

"Holy crap that thing's using up a ton of mana," I thought.

The room was constructed in such a way that magical energy wouldn't escape it. We weren't able to feel the sheer amount of magical energy whirling around within it until we entered. The device was clearly very powerful; it would've been easy to detect had the room not been manaproofed.

Wait. What if we just took it instead? Destroying it seems like it would be a waste of a perfectly good item. The water dragon would lose its buff even if I just shove it into my dimensional storage. There really isn't any reason not to take it, is there?

I settled on the idea of stealing the device, but decided to save working out the details for later.

"I'm going to want to jack this thing a bit later, but let's just drop a beacon and head back up to the deck for now."

"Nn." Fran acknowledged my suggestion, turned around, and got ready to leave.

She had originally planned on walking her way back up to the deck, but her plans were thrown off the moment I finished setting up a beacon. The boat suddenly began violently shaking from left to right and back and forth at random.

"Earthquake...?" Fran muttered.

"Probably just feels that way because we're inside the ship. Something probably happened. Let's hurry back up to the deck."

"Nn!" She nodded.

Fran rushed to the deck, darting through the ship's swaying corridors and dashing up the stairs on her way. The sheer force with which the vessel continued to wobble throughout her journey seemed to indicate a major change in the status quo.

Upon arrival, we expected to see the water dragon flailing about, but we were instead greeted by a sight completely outside our expectations.

"T-The fuck is that!?"

"Big octopus legs?" Fran tilted her head in confusion.

"Wait! Fuck! Those are kraken tentacles!"

"Oh."

The catkin nodded as she observed the long, thick, wriggling tendrils. Several of the kraken's feelers had already wrapped themselves around the dragon, binding it and subjecting it to the oversized octopuses' attacks.

"What!?" I groaned as I caught sight of our ship out of the corner of my eye. *"Something totally busted up one of the Algieba's masts!"*

"There you are!" Seeing that she'd emerged from the warship's interior, Mordred rushed over and filled Fran in on the status quo.

"What happened?" Again, she tilted her head in a questioning manner.

"Well, you see..."

He elaborated on the present state of affairs by describing the events that transpired between when we left and when we returned.

Mordred brought Suarez over to the dragon so he could order it to stand down—exactly as we discussed ahead of time. Unfortunately, the prince had other ideas. Though we hadn't the intention, Suarez had been concerned that we would execute him once he issued the order, so he told the water dragon that he wanted it to go on a rampage. Mordred immediately attempted to threaten him into rescinding the command, but he refused. No amount of pain or punishment was enough to force the over-dignified royal into submission.

Freed from its fetters, the water dragon loosed a breath attack towards the Algieba. It tore down one of the galleon's masts and damaged its deck in the process. Our ship was sturdy enough to withstand the hit, but it wouldn't last for long if the assault continued. Fortunately, and unfortunately, the dragon was attacked by a group of kraken right before it could launch a second projectile.

"Those, kraken?" Fran pointed at the mollusks, her tone filled with curiosity.

"A whole three of them." Mordred frowned. "I guess you could say they technically saved our skins, but it looks like executing our old plan is out of the question. Let's hold off on destroying the dragon's augmentation device for now."

"Got it."

As always, Mordred's judgement was spot on. Water dragons were stronger than kraken—they would almost undoubtedly come out on top given a one versus one scenario—but the difference in strength was not nearly significant enough for the dragons to take on two kraken, let alone three. Our water dragon was currently faring quite well in combat, but only because its defenses had been bolstered. It seemed like it would probably die the moment the device supporting it was deactivated, especially given that it was already in the process of being attacked on all sides.

And if the water dragon died, the kraken would likely set their sights on the Algieba. Preserving it was undoubtedly in our best interest.

"Can't just kill all?" Fran asked as she stared down all four monsters present.

"I do think we can, but it's probably not a good idea," I muttered.

Both types of monsters were highly specialized hunters. The water dragon was highly offensive, and quite dextrous. The kraken had outstanding defenses, and they were known to regenerate. I was confident that we could defeat all four monsters regardless of their specialities so long as we used both Kanna Kamui and Black Lightning Advent, but doing so would leave us exhausted—and that was incredibly short sighted.

The area we were currently in was called the Kraken's Nest. It was not only possible, but rather likely that kraken would continue attacking us even after we left the water dragon's immediate vicinity. Draining ourselves was unwise.

"I'd say we should probably try to escape while the water dragon and kraken go at

each other,” Mordred suggested.

“Got it. Return to Algieba?”

“Yeah. Could I get you to move us over again? All our men are already standing by on deck and waiting for you.”

Mordred had clearly already considered our options and come to a conclusion prior to our return. Both the sailors and adventurers had been organised so that they would be ready to depart at a moment’s notice.

All the adventurers were present and accounted for, but we had lost a few sailors in the exchange.

It’s kind of unfortunate, but that’s just how these things go, I contemplated. A melee was a type of messy skirmish. It just wasn’t possible for everyone that participated in it to come out alive.

Putting the relatively depressing thought aside, I opened a Dimension Gate so the survivors could make their way back to the Algieba.

To be honest, I was disappointed. I really wanted to kill the water dragon. I wanted both its core and the materials we could loot off its corpse. I also really wanted to steal the device that bolstered its defenses, but it looked like I would have to give it all up. Fran’s safety was much more important than any amount of material gain.

All the sailors and adventurers, Mordred aside, left through the portal, leaving Fran and the B ranker as the last two individuals remaining on the enemy’s ship.

“Give me a second,” he commanded. “I’ll cast a spell to make it harder for them to chase us down.”

“Doing what?”

“I can’t do too much against monsters this strong, but I should at least be able to lock them down a bit.”

Mordred pulled an elixir out from one of his pockets and swallowed its contents in a single gulp. I appraised the strange liquid and identified it as an item that drastically increased both one’s proficiency in lava magic and overall magical prowess for several

minutes.

“There goes a whole year’s worth of income,” the B ranker grumbled.

“That expensive?”

“Yeah, but it’s worth it. It’s extremely effective and doesn’t have any side effects.”

Wait, just how much does a B ranker make in a year anyways? Hmm... Probably somewhere around three million a year, I guess? Wait, that potion costs three whole million? Shit! Though I guess it does kind of seem like it’d be worth it...

Consuming the potion had boosted Mordred’s magical powers by a factor of five. He promptly took advantage of his strengthened abilities and cast a spell.

“Vulcan’s Order!”

The warship’s two anchors floated over to Mordred from their respective positions. He manipulated the two 10 meter wide lumps of metal, melted them down and merged them to form a single, massive, steel serpent—a feat that would have been impossible had he not consumed an expensive potion.

The massive metallic snake abided his commands. It wrapped itself around both the oversized octopuses and the dragon they were assaulting and bound them as it hardened. Despite their size, the monsters were unable to escape. His spell locked them in place.

“Whew...” He relaxed his shoulders and heaved a sigh. “I’ve strengthened it as much as I could, but it won’t last too long against monsters that powerful. Let’s get out of here.”

“Okay.” Fran grabbed Suarez—who’d been rendered unconscious after refusing to listen to Mordred one too many times—and followed the more experienced adventurer through the portal and back onto the Algieba.

After passing through the gate, she turned around and gave us a bigger picture view of the whole kraken-dragon engagement. Frankly, it looked like a fight between several of the giant monsters you’d often see in P*wer R*ngers.

“Wow.” Fran stared at them as they struggled against one another and their newfound metal bindings.

"Any ship that gets caught up in that is bound to sink," I mused.

Mordred's spell denied the water dragon the opportunity to chase us. We would, without a doubt, be able to open up some distance between it and us so we could escape.

"More."

"Oh god, there's even more!?" Fran's statement caused me to panic.

Another Kraken appeared on the water dragon ship's stern, seemingly attracted by the commotion.

"Man the sails! Full speed ahead, get us the 'ell out of here immediately!" Jerome yelled.

"Master. There, look."

"Wher—Oh shit. You have got to be kidding me."

Only then did I realize that, by "more," Fran hadn't been referring to the kraken, but rather, the arrival of another sort of creature, one that looked like it'd come straight out of the realm of nightmares.

"Fran! Get the crew's attention! Make sure it gets noticed!"

"Nn. Big enemy!" She quietly nodded and voiced her agreement before yelling in a voice loud enough for all the sailors to hear.

"Big...? Ohhhh fuck!"

"The hell is that thing!?"

"You've gotta be kidding me!"

"Shit, shit!"

"Oh come on!"

Their eyes widened as they caught sight of the creature she'd directed their attention towards.

"Well, no rest for the weary, I guess," I grumbled as I examined the monster's features.

The grotesque critter was one that I recognized on sight, one I highly doubted I'd ever be able to forget.

Its body was covered in a thick layer of reddish, yellow-brown skin. Its head looked very much like that of a sea anemone's, but, with massive fangs lining the inside of its mouth.

A creature known as a parasite that plagued the ocean and leeches off of its life.

A midgard wyrm.

Chapter 259

The Water Dragon's Demise

The Midgard Wyrms wriggled its body as it rapidly darted through the sea at an incredible speed.

Fortunately, the Algieba wasn't its target. It was instead headed straight for the water dragon warship, seemingly because it wanted to attack the monsters in its vicinity.

Or at least that was what I'd thought at first.

"Nn? Midgard wyrms disappeared?"

[Did it dive out of view or something?]

Wait, wasn't it supposed to be heading straight towards the kraken and water dragon?

The midgard wyrms resurfaced the moment I questioned its actions.

"Gyagogoggoooooooooo!"

It attacked the still entwined dragon and kraken from directly below, a tactic likely derived from its instincts rather than its intellect.

The midgard wyrms raised their bodies about 10m into the air as a testament to its brute strength before leaning itself on the water dragon warship. Unable to handle the monster's ridiculous weight, the symbol of Sheedran's might creaked and snapped in two.

The resulting shockwave caused the ocean's tides to turn violent and rock the Algieba as would a heavy storm.

"Uwawawawa!"

"Don't fall into the sea!"

The midgard wyrm's sea anemone-like mouth once again emerged from the ocean with a water dragon's neck and several kraken tentacles hanging from its mouth.

"Kuooooon..."

The plesiosaurus-like monster, which normally would've had the might to decimate a large city, whimpered feebly. It was no longer capable of action.

"Gyoooooooooo!"

The midgard wyrm's proud cry echoed throughout the sea, as if to declare its victory.

"This is looking bad. Hurry the 'ell up, you bilge rats! We need to get outta here immediately!"

"Yessir!"

"Can we actually escape a midgard wyrm, Captain?"

"No clue. It's way faster than us, but we might be able to get away if it decides to attack some more kraken instead of chasing us down."

Jerome's response to Mordred's question was grim.

Mydgard wyrms swallowed things whole, so they didn't have to stop to chew. In fact, eating didn't inhibit them from moving in any which way. They were known for consuming everything in an area and then slowly digesting it all later.

Still, we would have more than enough time to get away if it first went after all the kraken and the pirates that'd fallen into the sea. But unfortunately, things weren't going to work out that conveniently for us.

"Looked this way."

[It's heading for us cause our ship's bigger than pretty much anything else it can find, it seems]

It swiveled its head around a bunch and examined its surroundings before finally looking back at us.

Following its instincts, it headed towards the biggest prey it could see, our ship.

It rapidly closed in on us.

“Black Lightning Princess! I need you to do us a favour!”

Jerome ran over to us. Behind him were several sailors carrying a huge barrel.

“What?”

“I need you to fly again, and dump this barrel somewhere off opposite the direction we’re headed. It’s filled with stuff midgard wyrms love, it should be attracted by its scent and stop chasing us.”

“Nn. Got it.”

“Thanks. Here’s to hoping it actually works.”

The barrel was normally supposed to be used before the wyrm got as close as it was, but Jerome hadn’t had the chance to issue the order. He had been preoccupied by the water dragon/kraken fight. He didn’t know how much effect it would have given the lack of distance, but he wanted to at least try gambling on it nonetheless.

[Alright, let’s try dropping it.]

“Nn. Urushi, go.”

“Woof!”

Fran took the barrel, leapt on Urushi’s back, and had him run straight behind the midgard wyrm before dropping the cylindrical, wooden casket into the sea. It broke open as it hit the water’s surface and spilled its contents all over.

[Is it working?]

“Nn... No.”

[Tsk.]

The red, yellow and brown abomination was more attracted to the Algieba than the

stuff it apparently loved due to the ship's proximity. And as such, it continued to rush the ship down.

Looking at the wyrm from our angle really emphasized its size. The goddamn thing was massive.

[What about getting its attention by attacking it?]

"Nn! Thunderbolt."

"Groooooowl!"

[Flare Blast!]

We fired spells at the midgard wyrm's exposed back so we could draw its attention away from the ship. I figured that, if we were lucky, we'd be able to draw its attention to the barrel—but we weren't.

[Damn it! It's totally ignoring us!]

It was too big. Our weaker strikes were too insignificant for it to note.

[How about this then!? Thor's Hammer!]

A thunderbolt struck the midgard wyrm dead on and caused an explosion, but not even that was enough to stop the creature's charge. It cared much more for eating than it did for our attacks.

(Master, what now?)

[Well... Honestly, our only hope at getting its attention is probably going to be getting between it and the ship. Looks like it's either sink or swim.]

Fighting the midgard wyrm head on was our only choice. I wasn't confident we could beat it, but we didn't need to. We just needed to hit it hard enough to stop it in its tracks.

We went back to the ship and told its captain that we were going to hit the monster really hard. We also made sure they were aware that Fran would end up exhausted thereafter. She wouldn't be able to fight anymore.

“Don’t be ridiculous! There’s no way you could beat a midgard wyrm, is there!?”

Jerome was shocked by the suggestion.

“Might at least slow down.”

“I guess you’re right... Our only choice is to leave it up to you.”

“No problem.”

“Make sure you come back in one piece, alright?”

“To adventurers, own life most important”

“Gahahaha! Good point. Then do your best. Show that thing hell.”

“Nn!”

The task entrusted to us was a simple one. All we had to do was put all our power into one attack and blast it right at the midgard wyrm before retreating.

[Urushi, focus all your efforts in making sure Fran stays safe on her way back, alright?]

“Woof.”

And if worse comes to worst, I’ll think of something and hopefully handle the situation myself. But enough of that for now. I’ll cross that bridge when I get to it.

Chapter 260

The Legendary Monster

[Alright, let's do this!]

“Nn! Awakening.”

Fran awakened as she looked down at the midgard wyrm from Urushi's back. She went full throttle right off the bat and immediately activated Brilliant Lightning Rush.

The electricity radiating off her body caused Urushi's fur to stand on end.

[Let's start by provoking it and making it raise its head.]

“Got it.”

“Woof.”

[And when it opens its mouth, we hit it with everything we've got.]

“Nn! Urushi.”

“Woof woof!”

Urushi slowed down, bravely placed himself right in front of the midgard wyrm, and fired several spells at the creature's submerged head.

[Leave attacking it while it's still underwater to me.]

Urushi's attacks weren't having too much of an effect, so I asked him to relinquish his role as an attacker for the time being.

Taking his place, I dove underwater. I made a beeline for its face and started blasting it with lightning and explosions.

It ignored the first strike, but the second and third ticked it off enough for it to start to

twitch.

[Alright, this should do the trick.]

I threw in a telekinetic catapult just for good measure and charged straight at the monster's head. I didn't expect it to do too much damage given the amount I was being slowed by the water resistance, but for some odd reason, the attack managed to get a huge reaction out of the midgard wyrm. It stopped moving and loosed a loud roar the moment it got hit.

"Gyobobobobooo!"

The sea stirred. The massive shockwave spawned from its bellow caused the ocean's waves to violently rock through my surroundings.

[Woah!?!]

I didn't take any damage from the shockwave, but it sure as hell fucked me up. The resulting water pulses knocked me around and disoriented me to the point where I couldn't tell up from down.

I was surprised. It seemed really mad, and I didn't understand why. The telekinetic catapult's damage shouldn't have differed much from my spells'.

After hurrying back to Fran, I realized that the wyrm was totally locked onto us. It raised its head out of the water and stared us down with its neck curved like a goose's. Though its face lacked eyes, I could tell it was giving us a hateful glare. It wanted to kill us so badly that its body had started radiating pure enmity.

"Did something?"

[Dunno. It suddenly got all pissed right after I hit it with a telekinetic catapult.]

"Remembered last fight?"

[Last fight?]

"Nn? Last time, blasted face off with telekinetic catapult."

[Wait, that's the same one we fought last time?]

“Nn.”

The monster had higher hp than it did last time we saw it, and I’d known that it was possible for the midgard wyrm to grow infinitely, but I’d still presumed it a different individual.

Fran, however, was somehow able to tell that it was the exact same individual. Maybe it’s just a beastkin thing?

But that would mean that this wyrm’s the exact same one we fed all the monoliths.

[So it remembered me even though it’s dumb as a single celled organism?]

Does it not forget grudges? Oh well, it’s not the only one that still wanted to fight. It was time for us to show it just how much we’d grown since our last conflict, even if we had to end up running away.

It tried chasing Urushi down, but it was far too big to catch him. He could easily slip somewhere it was harder for the massive creature to reach.

The act of him running around bought me enough time to get my spell ready.

[I’m good to go, Fran.]

“Nn!”

We struck the moment it tried to attack Urushi, and launched our attacks straight into its mouth.

[Now! Kanna Kamuiiiii!]

“Haaaah! Black Lightning Advent!”

My spell, a dragon made of pure white lightning, mixed with Fran’s, a burst of jet black lightning, and flew straight into the wyrm’s interior.

I used the sorcery skill to put 80% of the mp I had left into the attack and hit the midgard wyrm with the most powerful Kanna Kamui we’d ever used to date. Likewise, Fran had also poured every last bit of her mana into her black thunderbolts.

The wyrm's head exploded into a million pieces. Blood, flesh, and other fragments of the sea serpent's body, flew all over the place and fell around us like pieces of a deflated balloon. The explosion had been huge; it covered an area 50 meters in diameter.

It caused waves to pour through the ocean and crash into the Algieba. I quickly turned towards the ship out of concern to check on it, and breathed a sigh of relief after confirming it was still fine.

The only reason it didn't get capsized was because the wyrm's thick ass body had absorbed most of the impact. In a sense, one could say that the wyrm had actually stopped the ship from flipping over.

Speaking of which, the wyrm itself was a terrible sight to behold. A third of its body was flat out missing. Serpent and centipede type monsters were known for their vitality, but the wound was so bad it looked like it would've been more than fatal for any normal member of either of the two aforementioned types.

But the midgard wyrm was an A ranked magic beast, a creature far outside the realm of human imagination. Though its defenses were lackluster, the injury we'd given it was far from fatal.

General Information

Species: Midgard Wyrms (Sea Serpent Type Monster)

Level 62

HP: 28117/39823

MP: 591

STR: 4139

VIT: 4699

AGI: 108

INT: 5

MGC: 112

DEX: 24

Skills

Absorption: Lv 2

Regeneration: Lv 2

Predation

It still had over two thirds of its max health, and it was already starting to rapidly regenerate.

[Fuck, that thing's a monster. But we at least managed to slo—oh shit.]

“Not... good...”

Wait, what the fuck!? That thing's headed for the Algieba even though it doesn't have a head!? How is it already moving!? Aren't you normally supposed to wait for your missing body part to regenerate before you start doing shit again!?

Is its brain not in its head, or does it have multiple, like how it has a bunch of different hearts? Wait, does it even have a brain in the first place?

Fuck! Thinking about this shit is just a huge waste of time!

[Urushi, get in front of it again!]

“Woof!”

The only choice I had was to use the rest of my mana to hit it with another Kanna Kamui. And if that didn't stop it, I'd have no choice but to use my real trump card.

“Mas... ter... okay?”

[Yeah. I'll be fine. You can sit back and rest for now.]

“Nn.”

I left Fran to Urushi and leapt off so I could focus on casting my spell. I wasn't expecting it to do much. I didn't have enough mana.

[I really want to avoid using Latent Potential Release unless I really have to.]

Things were looking pretty grim. I was probably going to have to use it in the end—or at least that was what I thought was going to happen.

[Huh?]

The situation suddenly took an unexpected turn.

I felt a powerful, imposing presence. It was several kilometers away, but it was incredibly overbearing nonetheless. The speed at which the *thing* came at us was incredible. It looked like it was somewhere around the 500 km/h range.

[Fuck, that thing's huge!]

There was no other way to put it. The only part I could see was the part sticking out of the water, the thing I presumed to be its dorsal fin. That alone was already 20 meters high and 100 long. I was certain that the thing coming at us was some sort of monster.

[Urushi, get the hell out of here!]

“W-Woof!”

Retreating, I returned to Fran's side. Urushi was terrified; he was trembling with his tail between his legs. Fortunately, he still somehow managed to move his way back over to the Algieba.

“Master, that, what?”

[No idea. Appraisal won't work because I can only see its fin.]

That said, I had more than enough information to guess. Its aura carried way more magical energy than the midgard wyrms. It was clearly a monster even more powerful than the one we'd just fought.

“Master, that.”

[I knew it!]

The mystery monster rushed the midgard wyrm and attacked it.

“Gaaaaaooooooooooooooooooooo!”

It drove its fangs into the midgard wyrms body and lifted it, and in doing so, showcased its 100m long neck. It was adorned from head to tail in beautiful scales, like a kingfisher. I couldn't help but feel that it both resembled a dragon and a sort of serpent.

General Information

Species: Leviathan (Oceanic Divine Dragon//Divine Beast)

Lv 87

HP: 92336

MP: 36887

STR: 181397

VIT: 22699

AGI: 3123

INT: 6039

MGC: 9996

DEX: 1698

Skills

Unknown

Description

Unknown

[Haaaah... hahahaha]

Appraising caused me to break into laughter. There simply wasn't anything for me to do but laugh. It was so strong I couldn't even see its skills. It was a veritable S ranked monster, a ridiculously overpowered creature capable of destroying the entire world if it wished to.

Just appraising it had completely drained me of the will to fight.

I immediately began to think of the worst case scenario, and what I needed to do. If the Leviathan attacked, then my only choice would be to abandon the Algieba and focus on preserving Fran.

I would have to teleport us away the moment it showed even the slightest sign of aggression.

Right as I started working out the details, the leviathan looked at us—but its eyes lacked even the slightest semblance of hostility.

Its gaze instead seemed to momentarily reflect a sense of amusement, as if it was entertained. The impression only seemed to last for a second, so I wrote it off as just my imagination. I assumed that I'd started deluding because of how much I'd hoped it wouldn't antagonize us.

Either way, the leviathan ended up leaving; it turned around and nonchalantly carried off the midgard wyrm despite its desperate struggles to break free of the more powerful monster's grasp.

[It looks like... it let us off the hook...?]

"Nn..."

"Whimper..."

Chapter 261

Returning to the Ship

Though the leviathan, the Divine Beast, had saved us, it'd also kind created its own sort of trouble for the sole reason that encountering it was nothing short of extraordinary. Upon returning to the ship, we'd realized that everyone had totally lost their wits.

Some had spaced out, whereas others had started smiling like idiots. There was even a group that'd started to offer the heavens their prayers.

Like basically everyone else, Jerome and his first mate had been unable to respond in their usual manners. Instead, they'd started laughing dryly.

I was honestly impressed that the Algieba was still upright and floating. The crew's current state seemed to indicate that it should've already capsized, especially given what'd just happened. The leviathan was huge, so massive waves accompanying its advent were only a given—

—Except they weren't.

It somehow managed to avoid disturbing the ocean and creating waves despite its massive size.

Does that mean it was trying to avoid capsizing the Algieba? Nah, no way, right? It was probably just coincidentally using something that let it swim faster through the reduction of water resistance or something.

Mordred, Jerome, and Buphett regained their senses in that order, mostly because that was the order Fran decided to lightly shake them in.

Despite being known for his calmness and rationality, he was panicked. The event had shocked him enough to make him start shouting hysterically the moment he finally regained his capacity of speech.

“Shit! I just sweat enough cold sweat for a whole goddamn lifetime. I'm surprised my

heart didn't stop. Holy fuck, that was absolutely terrifying. I think I'm not going to accept any boat related escort jobs for a good while!" Mordred screamed.

We ran into a water dragon, some kraken, a midgard wyrm, and then the S ranked leviathan to top it all off. We had a total of four different encounters in a matter of moments. Each one of the four groups of creatures was powerful enough to cause instant death, and hence, we'd ended up getting swept into a series of fierce battles. It'd been far too much to take in, even for Mordred. The experienced adventurer had been reduced to a terrified mess.

"Dude. Woah. Shit. Did ya see that thing? Did ya!?" Jerome, on the other hand, was excited as all hell. He was leaning over the ship's edge and staring off in the direction the leviathan had went.

"Aye, captain... But I do have to say, I never did imagine we'd see it around these parts..." Buphett commented. "Wait, what if..."

Unlike the other two, Buphett's state was more akin to one of suspicion. He'd already moved on to questioning the leviathan's motives.

"Leviathan, only supposed to show up in demonic ocean?" Fran directed her question towards Jerome, as his state of mind had seemed much more sound than that of anyone else present.

Man, that thing was god damned massive. It would've have measured somewhere in the 100m range even if you only looked everything from the base of its neck up till the tip of its nose. Its head alone seemed to be about 40-50m tall. I didn't see how it could've possibly even fit around these parts. The deepest areas apparently only go 300m down, meaning there are likely many spots with a depth of 100m or less.

Given its size, the leviathan most likely would have ended up scraping itself around the ocean floor as it moved about.

"That's how it's always been in the past, but the past and the present are clearly two completely different things. S'true that it's only ever been seen in the demonic sea, but, that ain't enough evidence for us to say that it'll never show up anywhere else. The thing's a goddamn legend. Ain't no way for us humans to understand everything 'bout it," Jerome shrugged.

Yeah, makes sense. There isn't any reason for it not to leave its nest to hunt and what not, especially seeing as how it literally just did exactly that.

There was no reason for the leviathan to stay in a small, confined area given its speed. There seemed to be a good chance that it just so happened to have only been sighted in the demonic sea, and that it was actually moving around and going wherever it wanted while remaining under water all the time.

"Alrighty, now that that's over with, we should probably get the 'ell outta 'ere," the captain quickly recovered and got back on task.

"That seems like quite a good idea. All the kraken have fled due to their fear of the leviathan, so we've got ourselves just the chance we need." Likewise, his first mate also refocused himself on a more immediate set of priorities.

The kraken were no match for the midgard wyrm or leviathan, so they'd all long escaped the area. Likewise, the pirates we'd cast into the ocean were also nowhere to be seen. They'd all either been dragged off by kraken, swallowed by the sea serpent, or simply caught in the massive waves that resulted from the creatures' advent and washed away.

"So what are we going to do with him?" The first thing Mordred did after regaining his wits was kicking the prisoner rolling around at his feet. Suarez just happened to have gotten brought back to the Algieba because that was simply the most natural flow of things. He was still unconscious, mostly due to all the pain Mordred had inflicted on him while trying to get him to fold.

"What do you say to randomly dumping him somewhere?" He commented while giving the man another kick.

There isn't really any point in keeping him alive much longer seeing as how the dragon is already gone and whatnot, but he is still royalty, so keeping him alive might present us with some sort of merit.

He could be used as a sort of bargaining chip, but at the same time, it was also possible for him to end up functioning to ignite some sort of political conflict. There was no way for us to know the consequences of our actions for sure, so we instead chose to leave the decision in a more qualified person's hands. That is, we had Jerome, a man officially sanctioned by the Beastkin's country, make the final call.

“Hmm... I’d say we’d best keep ‘im in the ship’s hold for now,”

“Aye, captain, I agree, especially seeing as how he might even have some sort of bounty on his head,” Buphett added.

“You don’t say. Stealing one of those Water Dragon Warships is a surefire way to earn a country’s ire,” the captain smirked.

A part of me had thought that it might’ve ended up being some sort of gift, but apparently that was definitely not the case. Every Water Dragon Warship was a vital part of the country’s forces. Having one rampage about was prone to leading to diplomatic problems.

In other words, there was no way Suarez had any claim to the ship he’d been in possession of.

“It’d be much more convenient for us to get rid of ‘im, but I’d say he’s got enough use to keep around,” Jerome grumbled.

With that, Suarez’ fate was decided. Mordred took him in the hold and organised the adventurers so they could keep watch.

“How are you feeling, princess?”

With all urgent business dealt with, Jerome turned back towards Fran and asked her about her condition.

“She looks quite exhausted to me,” his first mate commented.

“Nn... Body feels heavy.”

The Black Lightning Advent Fran put all her power into had drained her of most of her stamina and magic. She could still walk, but she lacked the ability to engage in any sort of serious conflict.

“I would expect so, seeing the amount of power behind the attack you launched. I doubt you’ll be able to perform too well in combat as you are right now, so please do get back to your room and get some rest.” Buphett dismissed her from her duties so she could heal up and be ready for any battles to come going forward.

“Nn. Will do.”

We decided to have Urushi guard the deck in Fran’s place while she rested. He and Mordred would probably be more than enough to handle any monsters that came the ship’s way while Fran was out of commission.

“We’re counting on you Urushi.”

“Do best.”

“Woof!”

Chapter 262

Greyscale

Two days had passed since we'd run into the Leviathan and nearly met our demises.

"Drop the anchors!" Jerome shouted.

"Aye aye captain!"

"One of you is going to need to run over to the magistrate's office. We've a serious political situation on our hands, one involving royalty," Buphett noted as the crew began getting to work.

"Yes sir!" One of the sailors immediately responded and began running an errand as per his instructions.

The Algieba managed to safely reach Chrom. More specifically, it found itself currently docked in the port of a seaside city named Greyscale. Both the city and the port were about a whole size smaller than Barbra's, but still of a respectable scale nonetheless.

All the adventurers had already gotten off the ship after receiving a hefty bonus. The total number of battles we engaged in was on the relatively low side, but they rewarded us handsomely nonetheless given the whole midgard wyrm incident. Fran in particular had been paid a whole hundred thousand golde.

With her duties completed and remunerations rewarded, she, like all the other adventurers, had gotten off the ship. She was currently standing in front of it, saying her goodbyes to her three apprentices.

"Thank you very much, Ms. Fran."

"You taught us a whole lot."

"We'll do our best to make sure we keep training ourselves hard! We'll get strong enough to impress you next time we see each other!"

Naria, Miguel and Liddick responded in their usual ways as they got ready to leave, to which Fran responded with a simple “Nn.”

“Good bye!”

“Later!”

“Farewell!”

Their training had only lasted a few days, but it seemed to have been impactful nonetheless, as the three all seemed to have taken her teachings quite seriously. Fran had tried her best to play the role of an instructor as well, albeit seemingly because she wanted to kill time. I couldn’t tell whether or not she really thought of them as her apprentices. She didn’t seem reluctant to part with them, and I wasn’t even really sure whether she ever ended up remembering their names.

“We should probably head out too.”

“Miguel, Naria, Liddick,” I had many doubts about her stance on the matter, but Fran struck them all down before I even so much as had a chance to voice them by calling out to her three apprentices in turn.

“Huh?” Miguel’s jaw dropped.

“Teach just called us by our names!? That has to be the first time she’s ever done that!”

“D-Does that mean she’s acknowledged us?” Likewise, Naria and Liddick also responded with their voices filled by surprise.

“See ya.”

“See ya, teach!”

All three immediately responded in loud, clear voices.

Satisfied, Fran turned around and began to move without so much as even showing any sign of turning back.

“So you actually did end up memorizing their names?”

“Nn. Because apprentices.”

Fran’s response made it clear that she’d taken from the experience and matured, even if only a bit. As her guardian, I was overjoyed, both because she’d grown up and because a part of me empathized with her disciples. She’d reciprocated their emotions; their efforts hadn’t been in vain.

The first place Fran decided to head towards was the guild so she could pick up the request’s standard reward. She didn’t know where it was though, so she had Mordred and his buddies show her over.

“It should be right over there,” Mordred gestured towards the guild as it came into sight.

“Huge.”

“That’d be because Greyseal is a pretty big city.”

Greyseal’s guild wasn’t too far away from its port. The building was quite large, as per Fran’s description. Apparently, it was relatively influential because it was frequented by adventurers that liked picking up ship-related escort tasks.

Upon entering, we found ourselves staring down a bar with a large number of adventurers hanging around it. Some seemed to gaze upon Fran in one of many unrespectful ways, but quickly averted their eyes once they saw Mordred enter right behind her.

Being a B ranker, Mordred was quite well known, even in Greyseal. There weren’t any adventurers dumb enough to mess with anyone accompanying him.

Fran was both a cute child and a Black Catkin, so I expected a few people to try messing with her, but fortunately, it didn’t look like we would need to bother this time around. Though no one tried to explicitly attack her, that didn’t actually mean we didn’t have to deal with any sort of annoyances. A bearded, lazy looking middle aged man that seemed a bit too thin to be an adventurer waded through the crowd and approached us.

My immediate thought was that we were going to have to deal with him and whatever idiocy he would pull, but I was well off the mark.

“That’s a cute girl you found there Mordred. Is she travelling with you?” The lanky looking man grinned as he spoke in a teasing tone.

“Oh, hey Leroy. You’re a bit off the mark this time. She and I just happened to be escorting the same ship. It was her first time in Greyseal, so I lended her a hand and showed her over to the guild.”

“Huh. Well, I guess I’d better introduce myself then. The name’s Leroy, I work as an adventurer around these parts.”

“He’s only a D ranker, but he’s got great memory, so he can come in handy. I’ve often asked him for help so I could work around these parts without needing a map,” Mordred nodded as he affirmed the other man’s usefulness.

The fact that even Mordred asked him for help made me understand that Leroy was a respectable adventurer in his own right even though he didn’t look the part.

“Nn. C ranker, Fran.” The catgirl named herself curtly.

“You’re a C ranker at *that* age!? I could tell that you were pretty strong, but god damn!” Leroy’s eyes opened wide in response to Fran’s introduction, a reaction that caused Mordred to put on a bit of a wry smile and look at Leroy with an almost pitying gaze. He’d only just called Fran out the other day for being way stronger than was justified for a C ranker.

“I think you might want to change the way you introduce yourself, Fran,” he suggested.

“Why? Not lying.”

“That’s true, but I think you should at least make sure you mention that you’re the Black Lightning Princess.”

“What? She’s the Black Lightning Princess everyone’s been talking about lately?”

“That she is, friend.”

“That would mean she’s way stronger than me... Man, and her rank made me think we weren’t all that different in terms of our combat ability too...” Leroy was completely taken aback by Fran’s identity.

It seemed that information about Fran had already made its way to Greyseal through the merchants given Leroy's reaction and willingness to accept Fran's identity. Mordred, once again, had voiced a really good point that proved his judgement solid. Fran would be able to stop people from looking down on her so long as she revealed a bit more about herself.

There was, however, a certain risk related to Mordred's suggestion. Anyone that had yet to hear about Fran's exploits would likely think her an idiot with a self proclaimed identity. I wouldn't be able to stand for someone making fun of her as a result.

For that reason, we decided to stick with the C ranker thing for the time being.

"You serious!?"

"That's the Black Lightning Princess?"

"Wait, the Black Lightning Princess is here!? Where!?"

"Damn!"

"Y-Yo, you serious?"

It seemed that all the adventurers present had heard of her, as they immediately began kicking up a huge fuss. Some stood up in order to get a better look at Fran, while others let their curiosity get so out of control that they approached despite the heavy aura Mordred was giving off.

The reaction we got out of making Fran's identity public was even bigger than the one we'd gotten back in Barbra. Upon further observation, I realized that over 90% of the adventurers were beastkin, and that the beastkin were much more curious about Fran than I'd initially thought. Though their interests were far outside my expectations, I did at least understand them. Black Catkin weren't supposed to be able to evolve, but Fran had done it nonetheless. But more importantly, she had defeated Goldalfa, a veritable hero that all of the country's citizens knew.

"Did that little girl really manage to beat Goldalfa?"

"That's what they say. It's probably true too, seein' as how the info came from a merchant sanctioned by the crown."

“Must’ve been because he let her win though, right?”

“Huh, you’ve got a point. It might be one of those public appearance things.”

“Are you guys stupid? We’re talking about Goldalfa here, there’s no way he’d ever do that.”

“Yeah man, there’s no way Goldalfa would just fork over a win, especially not to a kid. That’d tarnish his reputation.”

“Exactly. You all know he’s not the type to pull his punches.”

“And you’ve gotta consider this. It wasn’t a spar either. I could see him holding back if it was a spar, but Ulmutt’s tournament lets its participants fight for real, so he must’ve been going all out.”

A fair number of the adventurers seemed to think that Goldalfa had allowed Fran to beat him. I couldn’t really refute their sentiments. It was quite hard to believe unless you were actually there.

People continued to stare at Fran even as she turned in her quest.

“And she’s really evolved too.”

“I know, right?”

“How the hell did she manage that?”

“I remember the merchants saying something about killing evil beings. I don’t remember the details though, ’cause I thought it was bullshit at the time.”

We’d long turned Evolution Concealment off so we could spread the idea that Black Catkin were indeed capable of evolution.

The merchants and nobles had already started to spread the method we told the Beast Lord. People would probably start believing it once we went around and showed off that Fran really had evolved.

Gazes continued to follow Fran all the way up to the moment she finally left.

“Alright, let’s find ourselves a place to spend the night and figure out how we’re supposed to get to the capital.”

“Nn.”

Stats below. Note: skills in master’s memory excluded by author

General Information

Name: Master

Wielder: Fran (Bound)

Species: Intelligent Weapon

Attack: 672

MP: 4800/4800

Durability: 4600/4600

Magical Conductivity: A+

Skills

Appraisal: MAX

Appraisal Blocking

Shape Shifting

High Speed Self Repair

Self Evolution (Rank 13 / Cores Absorbed: 8378/9100 / Memory: 124 // Points: 0)

Transformation (Superiorized)

Telekinesis

Lesser Telekinetic Boost

Telepathy

Lesser Attack Boost

Space/Time Magic: MAX

Skill Sharing

Intermediate Wielder Status Boost

Lesser Wielder Recovery Boost

Eye of Empyrea

Unsealable

Lesser MP Boost

Knowledge of Monsters

Sorcerer

Intermediate Memory Boost

Unique Skills

Principle of Falsehood: Lv 5

Dimensional Magic: Lv 4

Superior Skills

Sword Arts SP

Skill Taker

Doppelganger Synthesis SP

General Information

Name: Fran

Age: 12

Species: Beastkin (Black Cat/Black Heavenly Tiger)

Class: Magic Warrior

Status: Bound by Contract

Level: 45/99

HP: 551

MP: 432

STR: 306

VIT: 240

AGI: 295

INT: 212

MGC: 241

DEX: 210

Skills

Espionage: Lv 5

Wind Magic: Lv 2

Court Etiquette: Lv 4

Presence Detection: Lv 6

Sword Techniques: Lv 7

Sword Arts: Lv 8

Evil Resistance: Lv 1

Blink: Lv 6

Fire Magic: Lv 5

Lightning Magic: Lv 1

Cooking: Lv 2

Trap Disarmament: Lv 2

Trap Detection: Lv 2

Undead Killer
Evil Killer
Insect Killer
Vigour Manipulation
Goblin Killer
Sound of Mind
Demon Killer
Skilled Dismantler
Conviction
Sense of Direction
Magic Manipulation
Night Vision

Innate Skills

Awakening
Brilliant Lightning Rush
Magic Convergence

Special Skills

Black Cat's Protection

Titles

Undead Killer
Match For a Thousand
Evil Killer
Insect Killer
Lord of Dismantling
Recovery Magic User
Sword Lord
Goblin Killer
One Who Massacres
Skill Collector
Skill Maniac
Dungeon Conquerer
Super Big Eater
Demon Killer
Fire Magic User
Wind Magic User
Lightning Magic User

Chapter 263

The Horned Carriage Association

We found ourselves wandering around the suburbs not too long after we booked ourselves a place to stay the night. The original plan was for us to head back to the guild so we could figure out what we needed to do in order to get back to the capital, but speaking with the lady running the inn we chose had caused us to change our minds.

The innkeeper was a businessman with a whole plethora of connections. The combination of the information she'd gotten from her peers and her instincts as a beastkin had immediately allowed her to identify Fran the moment she walked through the door. As a result, she'd treated Fran with as much fidelity as she could possibly manage. That is, she offered the best room she had for an extremely discounted price.

She then went on to declare that she would treat the form Fran filled out as a family heirloom before hearing out our plans and giving us a bit of advice.

It was precisely her advice that led us to our current destination.

"That?" Fran tilted her head as she pointed to a building that seemed to match what the innkeeper had described to her.

"I think so. The roof's blue, and structure makes it look kinda like a barn. It's pretty much a perfect match."

Approaching the building a bit more confirmed that it was the exact one we were looking for; the sign hanging outside it labeled it as a branch of the Horned Carriage Association.

"Welcome," a calm, collected woman in her twenties called out to us as we entered the building. She looked quite similar to the type of girl one would often find working at the Adventurers' Guild, with the sole difference being that her uniform had been swapped out for another.

Unlike the innkeeper we met earlier, the association's receptionist was human, so she didn't immediately identify Fran. Many of the people we'd met along the way, however, did. Most of the people she walked by totally froze over the moment they realized that she wasn't just any average black catkin. Even those that had yet to hear about the Black Lightning Princess ended up stopping and staring the moment they realized that she had evolved.

Some of the older men that saw her had been shocked so far out of their wits that they started worshiping her on the spot. All in all, she was treated kinda like the type of mythical creature that bless with happiness all that managed to spot it — basically every beastkin she came across would stop in their tracks just to get a good look at her.

"Want information," Fran got to business and began questioning the clerk as I recalled the events that'd just transpired.

"Might this be your first time riding a horned carriage?"

"Nn."

The receptionist gave us a quick overview and explained the services the Horned Carriage association offered. Simply put, they basically provided a transportation service. They rented out carriages pulled by Dual Horns, rhino-like monsters with high speed and endurance. They took very few breaks, so they were able to reach their destinations roughly twice as quickly as horses could. They themselves were considered F ranked monsters, so they could also function to scare off thieves and other weaker potential assailants.

"I see," Fran nodded.

"Here are the prices," the receptionist showed Fran a piece of paper with a whole bunch of numbers written all over it. The fees seemed to vary based off of two main factors. The first was whether or not one was willing to share a carriage with other passengers. The second had to do with the amount of distance traveled.

"Want to go to capital."

"Your destination is Vestia then?" The receptionist pointed towards the fees written on the page and paused for a moment before continuing. "In that case, the fee will be 40,000 golde if you're willing to ride with other passengers, or 120,000 golde if you'd

like to reserve a carriage for yourself. The trip should take a total of around 10 days.”

“Expensive.” Fran’s one word comment referred to more than just the cash cost. She also meant that the trip would eat up far too much of our time. Seeing that Fran seemed rather confused, the receptionist showed her a map and began to explain the circumstances.

“This is where Greyseal is on the map. Vestia is right over here, to its west.”

“Not that far?”

Greyseal was on Chrom’s eastern coast. Vestia seemed like it was just a little to the west of it. I wasn’t able to make any definitive conclusions seeing as how the map was missing a scale, but it didn’t really look like it would take 10 days to move between the two relatively close points nonetheless.

Being as experienced as she was, the receptionist addressed all my concerns before I even voiced them.

“The straight line distance between the two cities isn’t too far, but you see this green patch?” She moved her finger over to the large green area right between Greyseal and Vestia.

“Scorpion Lion Forest?” Fran read the words aloud.

“Exactly. The Scorpion Lion Forest is designated as a C ranked haunt. Manticores, C ranked monsters, are known to live within it.”

Oh, so that’s why people avoid going straight through the forest.

There wasn’t any way the average person was going to be able to somehow manage to make their way through a C ranked haunt.

“The forest extends quite far, both to the north and to the south. The carriages have to go a rather long ways to loop around it,” the receptionist explained.

“No places to pass through?”

“It isn’t possible for a regular person, more skilled adventurers are known able to do it.”

“I’m an adventurer.”

“It does appear that way, but I don’t advise trying on your own.”

The receptionist was a really nice person. She seemed to think that Fran was a brand new adventurer, but she didn’t immediately shoot her down rudely, and instead phrased her statement in such a way to avoid injuring Fran’s pride. Moreover, she didn’t question whether or not Fran could afford a carriage ride, and simply continued to attentively answer all her questions regardless.

“Most adventurers setting off from Greyseal prefer passing through Argentlapn instead. The town’s fairly close to where the Scorpion Lion Forest is at its thinnest. You might be able to find yourself a party that’s looking to get through if you head over.”

In other words, we had two choices. The first was to loop around the Scorpion Lion forest by taking a huge detour. The second was to pass through it by heading over to Argentlapn. The haunt was apparently only ranked in at C. It likely wouldn’t give us too much trouble, so we would probably be much better off breaking through it...

That said, getting to Argentlapn was still a task in and of itself. The map made it seem like we could reach it so long as we headed in a south-westerly direction, but it probably wouldn’t be that simple in reality. The route undoubtedly had its own ups and downs, ones that a mere map wasn’t capable of illustrating.

“How much to Argentlapn?”

“It should take about a day. The cost is 3000 golde if you’re willing to ride with other people and 9000 if you want a private carriage.”

“Riding a Horned Carriage sounds like a pretty good idea as far as I’m concerned. It’ll be much more difficult for us to get lost if we get ourselves one.”

“Agreed,” Fran responded telepathically.

We’d been curious about horned carriages to begin with, so we ended up booking one that would set out first thing tomorrow morning. We spent a good bit of time debating whether or not we wanted to ride a public carriage or rent one out ourselves and ultimately ended up choosing the first option over the second. Publicity was important, and riding with other people was a pretty good way to advertise Fran’s status as an evolved Black Catkin.

“Do you have anything to serve as identification?”

“Adventurer’s Guild card okay?”

“Of course.”

“Then here.”

“Thank yooouwahat! You’re a C ranker!? Really!?” The receptionist’s eyes widened as she looked over Fran’s guild card. She flipped it over several times and examined it from all different angles before finally confirming its authenticity by scanning it with a sort of crystalline device.

“It’s... the real thing?” She was clearly taken aback and impressed by Fran’s ability.

“Nn. Real.”

“R-Right! I should give this back to you. I’m terribly sorry if I came off as rude.”

“No problem.”

“So I hope you don’t mind, but there’s something I’d like to ask you, seeing as how you’re a C ranked adventurer.”

“Nn,” Fran prompted the receptionist to continue with a nod.

“To be honest, we’re in need of escorts. We can’t seem to find enough to fill all our positions, so would you be okay with being a guard rather than a passenger? You’re a C ranker, so we’d be willing to give you a 50% discount if you’re willing to accept.”

“Why not enough? City has lots of adventurers.”

“Most of this city’s adventurers focus primarily on escorting ships. That’s all the more true right now given the current state of international affairs.”

“Meaning?” Fran tilted her head in confusion.

“Oh, did you perhaps come to Greyseal by sea?”

“Nn.”

“Things have started to get a bit tense between us and the neighbouring country, in part because the king’s currently off abroad. Most of the soldiers have been assigned to the border. Very few have been left to perform the usual patrols.”

The lack of soldiers led to a proportional increase in the number of thieves and monsters. Many of the adventurers that normally worked escort jobs were busy exterminating all the vermin that’d arisen due to the lapse in the usual military presence.

“War going to happen?”

“I doubt it given the agreements our country has with the Kingdom of Bashar, but tensions are rising nonetheless. That would in part because the Basharians don’t really quite like Beastkin.”

At present, the beastkin’s country was relatively free of discrimination. It was a peaceful, relatively accepting country. However, it hadn’t always been that way in the past. Beastkin used to hold many social advantages. Most other races were discriminated against, and even oppressed if one was to go further back in time.

Bashar was a kingdom comprised precisely of these discriminated people. It was originally established by a group that had either escaped from or been driven out of the Beastkin’s country. To that end, the Basharians hated the beastkin. They instead advocated human supremacy and ensured that humans were given more leverage and opportunities.

“As a human, Bashar’s past makes me feel ashamed. The country used to proclaim that humans were the ultimate race and that beastkin were just inferior beings meant to be treated as slaves.”

“Explained using past tense. Different now?”

“The royal family’s non-extremist faction rose to power approximately a hundred years ago. Though the two countries have yet to get along, the Basharians have become much more tolerant of our country than ever before.”

Unfortunately, the two countries were still keeping an eye on each other. The Beastkin’s Country recognized that they were currently in a state that made it so that the Basharians wouldn’t actually be able to do much against them, especially with the king being as strong as he was, but they still couldn’t help but have their soldiers

gather up upon learning that the Basharians had done the same—even though the Basharians had declared that they were only using their military might to clear a dungeon.

“And that’s why we’re a bit short on hands at the moment,” the receptionist concluded. “Would you be willing to take up the job and help us out?”

The 1.5k golde we would save was honestly just chump change for us, but the request was one that would officially go through the Adventurer’s Guild and add to our credit, so we figured there wasn’t really anything to lose.

“Will accept escort job to Argentlapn.”

“That’s great,” the receptionist smiled. “Is 6 in the morning a good time for you?”

“Nn. No problem.”

“Then we’ll see you then.”

Woo. Transportation get.

“Alright. I guess we can just kick back and relax until tomorrow.”

“First, eat all local specialties.”

“There’s local specialties around here?”

“Saw on sign just now.”

“You’ve always been quick to notice that kind of stuff... But alright, let’s go check it out.”

“Nn!”

Chapter 264

A Journey Aboard a Horned Carriage

The horned carriage we were riding in rattled as it travelled down the highway at a pace a horse-pulled vehicle could never match. Its destination was, of course, Argentlappn, the town closest to the Scorpion Lion Woods' most traversable subsection. Although we were working as guards, we were basically acting in the same manner as would any other passenger. We wouldn't need to do anything unless we were subject to an attack.

A calm atmosphere filled the carriage's interior. It was a strange mix, one that was somehow both relaxing and festive at the same time.

"Would you like a snack, milady?" One of the passengers handed Fran a treat.

"Thanks," Fran gratefully accepted with a nod.

A second and third passenger soon imitated the first and offered Fran a couple treats, which again, she accepted. Her acknowledgement of their offerings caused the other passengers aboard the carriage to react with joy. Speaking of the other passengers, most of them were older, unevolved individuals well past their prime. It was precisely this status of theirs that caused them to view her as an idol to worship and pay her a near superfluous amount of respect. The fact that she was a black catkin, a member of a tribe known not to evolve, only amplified the admiration they they held for her all the more.

In other words, the festive mood had stemmed from Fran's presence. She was being celebrated for allowing the older beastkin to breathe the same air as her. That said, they had given her too many offerings for her to hold; the many snacks presented to her ended up getting laid out in front of her.

The older individuals weren't the only ones aboard the coach. Some of the grandchildren were too. One would normally expect children to look upon the mound of snacks with greed or envy, but they weren't. Like their grandparents, they too were too busy idolizing Fran. As far as they were concerned, she was a hero. The combination of their grandparents' attitudes and their instincts as beastkin had

deemed her as such.

Young, innocent sounding cries of “Ebolving ish so cool!”, “I wanna be like Fuwan!”, and “Awesome!” filled the carriage as toddlers scrambled about and admired her.

Again, the atmosphere was peaceful and relaxing. But alas, it wasn’t to last.

“M-Monsters sighted!” The coachman shouted in panic as he spotted a group of enemies up ahead. The contents of his message caused the passengers to curl up in fear and direct their gazes towards Fran, as if begging for her to bring them salvation by resolving the situation.

“Milady, please! Eliminate the beasts!” The driver raised his voice again as he regained a bit of his composure.

“Nn. Got it,” Fran nodded as she stepped onto the coachman’s platform and looked ahead.

“T-Thank you very much!”

Ten odd german shepherd sized dog monsters looked to be waiting for us a bit down the road.

“Can’t just break through? Only around 10.”

“I-I’m sorry milady, but I’m ‘fraid that ain’t gonna be possible!” The coachman replied.

That wasn’t quite the response I was expecting. I knew that the dogs were monsters, but the Dual Horn was still the size of a god damned rhino. I assumed it would be able to just smash the dog like creatures out of its way and keep moving.

A bit of a closer examination revealed to me why I’d been wrong.

General Information

Species: Venom Dog

Dog type monster

Level: 11

HP: 33

MP: 13

STR: 17

VIT: 13
AGI: 61
INT: 8
MGC: 14
DEX: 12

Skills

Pursuit: Lv 3
Roar: Lv 1
Enhanced Sense of Smell
Magical Poison Fang

The monsters were called Venom Dogs. Their stats were quite low, but they were capable of delivering toxic bites through the use of their agility. Moreover, they would then use that superior agility stat to kite their foe around until it succumbed to their venom. It was an effective strategy, and one even the Dual Horn was prone to falling victim to given the sheer number of Venom Dogs. There was, however, a fairly simple solution. All we needed to do was obliterate the enemies before they closed in on us.

“Don’t slow down,” Fran ordered the driver as she got into position and lifted me into a combat ready stance.

“A-Are you sure?”

“Nn. Just leave to me.”

“Y-Yes ma’am!” Though he seemed to lack confidence, the driver still ended up obeying Fran’s commands because she’d evolved and he hadn’t.

“Alright, let’s do this!” I telepathically shouted.

“Nn.”

Fran launched me towards the monsters as I boosted my velocity with telekinesis. The attack was swift; I pierced through two of our enemies’ cores and absorbed them with pinpoint accuracy. I then used a mix of wind magic and sheer telekinetic force to prevent them from escaping before tearing through them one after another.

I grabbed their corpses and shoved them into my storage immediately after defeating

them. Venom dogs were quite weak. They probably weren't worth too much, but I decided to loot them regardless, just in case.

The coachman seemed to want to say something about the fact that the monsters had vanished in an instant, corpses and all, but ended up rescinding his comment because he didn't want to spoil Fran's mood. He instead heaved a sigh of relief and thanked her, to which she responded by nodding lightly as she returned to the vehicle's interior. There, she found herself showered in shouts of gratitude and praise.

She responded to them one by one at first by stating that she hadn't done anything impressive, and that she was just doing her job, but was eventually overwhelmed by their enthusiasm and forced to retreat back to the coachman's seat.

She'd already fulfilled her duty and showed off just how strong black catkin could be, so there wasn't really any issue with her retreating. That said, she still made herself an excuse and stated that she was repositioning herself so she could better remain vigilant of any additional monsters.

"Haha, they sure have kicked up a fuss." The coachman smiled wryly. The passengers had been quite noisy, so he knew exactly what had just happened.

"Nn."

The only thing that followed her reply was silence. The driver recognized that there was a large rift between her social status and his own and thus, remained silent and didn't really try talking to her. That said, he didn't seem particularly bothered by the silence. He simply continued to look straight ahead and direct the dual horn along the road before him.



And just like that, 4 hours flew right by.

"Town spotted," Fran commented as she awoke from a nap.

"You've got some really good eyes! We're just about coming up on Argentlapn," the driver replied, surprised.

It took a good bit of time, but we finally reached our destination. There was only a

single group of monsters on the way. Fran didn't really have much to do. The combination of her boredom and the vehicle's gentle shaking caused her to end up napping atop the driver's platform for most of the trip's duration.

"Adventurers' Guild in town?"

"A pretty big 'un. It's right by the town's entrance, so you'll prolly see it soon."

Unlike Greyseal, Argentlappn lacked a space specifically intended for horned carriages. Our vehicle had ended up pulling up beside a stagecoach just outside town.

The passengers began to get off shortly after the vehicle reached its destination. They each thanked Fran and then the driver in that order as they left.

"Thank you!"

"We owe you our lives, milady!"

"Bai bai Fuwan!"

She responded to them with the usual "Nn," before departing from the drop off area.

To be honest, having people treat us like that is kind of draining. It looks like we're going to have to put up with it if we want to keep bolstering the Black Cat Tribe's place in beastkin society though...

I felt the urge let out a mental groan as I entertained the thought, but was interrupted by Fran before I could.

"Master."

"What's up?"

"Tired..."

It looked like I wasn't the only one. But still, it wasn't really an issue. We were sure to grow accustomed to it in due time.

Chapter 265

Argentlapn

We found Argentlapn's Adventures' Guild immediately after passing through the town's front gate.

The size of the guild was, like Greyseal's, quite impressive. This made me believe that all the Beastkin's Country's guilds were large, but apparently that was a misunderstanding. Us seeing two larger guilds in a row was just a coincidence. Greyseal was a portside city and Argentlapn was right by the best place one could pass through the Scorpion Lion Forest. As far as adventurers were concerned, both were hotspots.

[There seem to be a good number of adventurers hanging around.]

"Nn."

Upon entering, we found more than 30 adventurers sitting around what looked like a bar and drinking booze.

All their gazes immediately flew right at Fran, evaluating her. Most were beastkin, so they immediately recognized Fran as someone who had evolved. The realization not only shocked them, but also eliminated any thoughts they had of harassing us. The reckless and ignorant adventurers that would've otherwise tried were immediately told to stand down by their buddies.

"W-Welcome."

"Nn. Want to sell monster parts."

"Sure thing. Could I please see your guild card?"

"Nn. C ranked adventurer. Fran."

"I-I knew it...!"

The receptionist already knew who Fran was. The guild's intelligence network reached both far and wide and its employees were held to a high standard, so they were always kept in the loop. She soon realized that she'd been timidly staring at Fran's card, so she lightly cleared her throat before returning it.

"I-I'm sorry, please excuse me. We handle all monster related transactions over there," she said, pointing towards a table

"Got it."

Fran brought out the corpses of the venom dogs she'd slain on her way over to the guild. They were not yet dismantled because we hadn't had the time to get to it.

For some odd reason, the adventurers were riled up by her bounty.

Wait, why do they seem so impressed? Venom dogs are only F ranked threats, aren't they? How is killing 10 of them any bit of a big deal?

Diving deeper into the conversation led me to understand the reasons for their admiration.

"That's quite the number of venom dogs, miss," said the guild's receptionist, her eyes wide. "Did you perhaps encounter a pack?"

"Nn," replied Fran.

"Wow, how impressive... I should've expected nothing less."

Venom dogs were quite difficult for weaker adventurers to handle because they had access to the Magic Poison Fang skill. Packs of 10 or more were considered especially dangerous and boosted their threat level up to E. In other words, one needed to be at least as strong as a D-ranker to handle a pack all by oneself.

It was obvious from looking at the corpses that Fran killed each one with a single blow, yet another testament to the extent of her skill.

"Meat edible?"

"It's poisoned, so unfortunately not. But on the flip side, the guild is willing to buy any sort of poison, so we'll be happy to take it off your hands regardless."

The guild ended up paying us 5k Golde a pop. The price was that low because the monsters had yet to be dismantled and all were missing their cores. The 50k profit we got seemed like it would probably be about enough to cover the night's lodging expenses.

"And here is your 50,000 Golde. Thank you for doing business with us," said the guild's receptionist, handing Fran a large bag of coins.

"Thanks," replied Fran. "Also, wanted to ask question."

"Please go right ahead."

"How to get to capital?"

"Give me just a second and I'll show you."

The receptionist pulled out a map of the surrounding area.

"The most important thing is knowing exactly where to go."

I looked at it and realized that we could enter the most narrow part of the Scorpion Lion Forest by heading south from where the town was located. It certainly did look like a good spot to use to break through.

"As I'm sure you've noticed already, this is where the forest is thinnest," she said, pointing to a spot on the map. "It only takes about a day to get out of the forest if you pass through here. The adventurers tend to call it 'The Shortcut.'"

"Got it. Chance of encountering manticore?"

"About one in one hundred."

"Seems low?" asked Fran, tilting her head.

"Manticores tend to avoid preying on adventurers if possible," explained the receptionist.

Weaker adventurers were easy prey, but the manticores would be overwhelmed if they ran into stronger adventurers. As a result, they believed attacking adventurers as risky and instead focused on the consumption of other monsters.

That said, some manticores would still attack adventures near The Shortcut. Those were either young and inexperienced, or desperate because they'd been driven out of their territory by stronger manticores.

"There's a road leading all the way to The Shortcut, so it should be quite easy to find."

Passing through the shortcut took one straight to the town of Roseraccoon, another large town bordering the Scorpion Lion Forest.

"While I do think you'd be perfectly fine on your own, you can find yourself a party if you so wish by checking the recruitment board over there." She pointed towards a large wooden board behind Fran.

"Recruitment board?"

"Yes. Safety comes from one's individual combat prowess, but can also come from numbers for those who are lacking."

Partying up allowed you to take on stronger opponents by working together with other people also capable of putting up a fight. Moreover, it also allowed the possibility of escaping by sacrificing one's companions in times of desperation.

That was why it was only natural for those that liked to solo or work in small groups to temporarily join up with each other and form slightly larger parties before attempting to move through the forest.

I, however, was against it. Partying up with people would only serve to slow us down.

"Hey there."

"Nn? Hi?"

"You're planning to head through the Scorpion Lion Forest, right? You wanna join us? We may not really look it, but we're E-rankers, so we won't slow you down or get in your way."

A handsome looking human adventurer approached and called out to Fran right as she attempted to leave the guild.

I couldn't help but feel a bit of suspicion with regards to his motives. I highly doubted

a non-beastkin E ranker would be able to discern the extent of Fran's might at a glance.

*That said, why was he going about assuming Fran **isn't** a weakling?*

"Called out to me, why?"

"Well I mean, you've pretty much got everyone's sights on you, and I just overheard something about you saying you were a C ranker."

"You believed that?"

"Well, you beastkin tend to have higher stats than us humans, and a good portion of you tend to be able to hold your own in a fight. I met another young, but incredibly strong beastkin girl around your age the other day too, so I'm pretty confident that you're a strong one."

"I see."

Welp, don't I feel like an asshole. He'd actually been wanting to party up with Fran and not trying to mess with her.

That said, we ended up turning down his invitation because he wasn't leaving until the day after tomorrow, and we couldn't afford to just sit around and waste time with our schedule. Moreover, I'd been thinking that it was possible for us to just get on Urushi and fly over the forest. Though, that would eat through his mana, so I wanted to go as far as possible on foot first. Thus having companions wouldn't quite work out with what we had in mind.

"We should leave now."

"Nn."

So, with that done, we thanked the receptionist and headed back out the front door.

"It's still morning, and we've still got the whole day ahead of us, so why don't we head right over to The Shortcut?"

"Think will encounter manticores?"

"Why again do you seem like you're looking forward to it...? Though, you've probably

gone and jinxed it now, so I'd say we're more or less sure to run into one."

"Can't wait."

Chapter 266

Scorpion Lion Forest

Translation: SupremeTentacle

Editing: Exkalamity, Sebas Tian

The act of “jinxing” something, also known as “raising a flag”, has always been one that has both brought trouble and evoked fear. It has changed all sorts of destinies. It’s known for hooking up average losers with the hottest girls in school, brutally murdering loving fathers serving in the military, reversing all but guaranteed victories, and everything in between.

So you’re probably wondering where I’m going with this tangent and all.

“Garuooooohhh!”

“Wasn’t there only supposed to be a 1% chance for us to run into a manticore?!” I complained.

“Nn. Lucked out,” Fran happily replied.

“More like this only happened ‘cause you jinxed it!”

We happened to encounter a 5 meter tall lion with a scorpion’s tail as we tried passing through The Shortcut.

General Information

Species: Manticore (Lion-type Monster)

Level: 31

HP: 398/819

MP: 81/196

STR: 201

VIT: 591

AGI: 350

INT: 203
MGC: 187
DEX: 267

Skills

Sole Sense: Lv 1
Sharp Nose: Lv 6
Espionage: Lv 4
Flame Breath: Lv 6
Vigilance: Lv 4
Harden: Lv 8
Herculean Strength: Lv 5
Shock Resistance: Lv 6
Resistance to Abnormal Status: Lv 6
Life Force Detection: Lv 4
Claw Arts: Lv 9
Claw Techniques: Lv 7
Earth Magic: Lv 5
Poison Spray: Lv 6
Tail Strike: Lv 9
Fire Magic: Lv 4
Physical Barrier: Lv 7
Roar: Lv 5
Night Vision
Vigour Manipulation
Reinforced Fur
Magic Poison Fang

Description: A monster that resembles a lion with a scorpion's tail. Its rank is justified by its defensive prowess as it's offensive stats tend to be relatively lackluster. It is quite easy to combat so long as you take note of its tail. Its core is located within its heart.
Threat level: C.

The manticore's stats seemed reasonable and rather fitting given its rank. That is, it was about as strong as all the other C ranked monsters we'd fought to date. As indicated by its description, its skills were mostly centered around bolstering its defenses.

That said, it had both Magic Poison Fang and Herculean Strength, so its ability to attack wasn't something to be underestimated.

Or at least that would've been the case if we'd run into it when it was in perfect condition.

"Dying?" asked Fran, as she tilted her head.

"Not quite. It's health and mana are both sitting at about half."

The manticore had deep wounds carved all over its body. The guild had said that younger manticores and manticores that'd been kicked out of their territory were the only two types that adventurers would normally encounter on The Shortcut.

The one we were staring down seemed to belong to the latter of the two categories. Its right leg had a deep gash in it and its right eye had a cut that seemed to render it useless. Its ever important tail had been torn down the middle and was missing its upper half, stinger and all.

"Nn."

"Groooooowl!"

It seemed to have sensed Fran's strength, as its back was arched like an aggravated housecat. Its injured leg had prevented it from running away, so it instead chose to ready itself to engage her in combat.

"Alright. Let's get ourselves some exp and loot its corpse once we're done."

"Nn!" Fran nodded, excited at the prospect of combat.

"Stay on guard, Urushi. Whatever almost killed our manticore friend here might still be nearby."

"Woof!" Urushi replied reliably.

"Let's go, Fran!"

"Nn! Awakening!"

The manticore's defenses were focused towards physical resistance as opposed to magical resistance. To that end, I was going to be taking charge of our offensive efforts; Fran's capacity for magic fell behind my own.

Fran was going to be focused on defense. She awakened in order to make it easier to avoid the enemy's attacks by using her perception-type skills in tandem with her boosted dex stat. She'd be using her Sword Lord Arts and Perfect Barrier to parry and mitigate anything she couldn't dodge. Though I was going to be focused on attacking, that wasn't all. I was also preparing a teleportation spell just in case we ever needed to escape.

"Graaaaaaohhhh!" the manticore roared as it lunged towards Fran.

"Fmph," Fran grunted as she dodged the manticore's strike and took to its rear.

"Sweet! It looks like you've got us into a pretty good position. Thunderbolt! Thunderbolt!!"

"Gyaaaaoooooooo!" the beast howled as the magical projectiles drove themselves into its body.

Lightning Magic's biggest perk was the crowd-control type effect that came with its damage. The paralyzing bolts slowed its limbs and allowed us to better avoid its strikes.

"Nn! Effective!"

"Yeah! Let's keep this up till it dies!"

We continued to fire off spells. We probably could've opened with Kanna Kamui or even Thor's Hammer and just straight up won, but, we didn't want to blow up the monster's core by spamming spells with too much power.

Thus we whittled our foe down with medium powered spells instead.

"Lightning Blast! Lightning Blast!!"

I called them medium powered, but that was only because I was used to casting the

two other spells I'd just mentioned. Truth be told, the spells I was casting were probably considered high powered given that they could hurt C ranked monsters.

Another four blasts of lightning caused the manticore to die.

"...Dead?" Fran narrowed her eyes, still on guard.

"Oh god damn it Fran! You're jinxing things again!" I groaned.

"Nn?"

Fortunately, we were fine this time around. The manticore was actually dead. It didn't get back up and attack. I pierced through its corpse and absorbed its core.

"It's been a while since I've last absorbed anything this strong."

My mood improved as I felt the manticore's magical energy flow into me. I ended up gaining a whole 200 monster core points worth of value from it, which was a lot more than I imagined. I almost wanted to run into another manticore now.

Unfortunately, it didn't seem like there were any other manticores nearby. They weren't the kind of monster one encountered regularly.

"Grr!" Urushi let out a low growl to warn us of an incoming entity.

"Something coming...!"

Likewise, Fran's ears twitched as she picked up on the individual the wolf had detected.

"Whatever it is has got quite a bit of magical energy."

The thing coming towards us had about the same amount of magical energy as a manticore, but it wasn't one. Whatever it was, it was approaching incredibly quickly.

And it wasn't alone. There was what seemed to be one of its allies following behind it as well. If they were monsters, it was possible that they were the type that hunted in pairs.

"I'll get us ready to teleport the hell out if need be."

"Nn."

Fran kept her guard up and took a combat ready stance with me in hand as she awaited the incoming pair. But both she and I were taken aback regardless.

"What impudence! I have been robbed of my prey!"

A young girl that looked to be only the slightest bit older than Fran complained as she sprang from the bushes. Her voice carried with it the sort of tone one would expect from a highborn.

She was pretty. She was really pretty. Her beauty was of such importance that I had to say it twice. Twice! [1]

Her hair was cut rather short, but curled inwards at the ends. Her eyebrows were thick, but not too long horizontally. They almost seemed a bit like the kind you'd see in Imperial, historical Japanese courts if you looked at her from afar. When combined with her big forehead, it made her give off a youthful charm. Both her hair and the ears that adorned her head were a platinum blonde while her skin was white as snow.

Her deep, crimson eyes clearly stood out from the rest of her visage. They were big, round, and carried within them all the girl's obstinacy and determination. The sheer strength of her gaze was more than enough to draw attention to her.

Furthermore, her eyes weren't the only thing that contrasted with her skin and hair; her armour did too. It was like her opposite: everything she wore was dyed in black. Her metal armour was ornamented all over with gold, giving her an air that was magnanimous and threatening. I couldn't help but feel like it was too over the top for a child to wear, but for some odd reason it seemed to suit her nonetheless.

I could tell at a glance that she was a beastkin, but I had no way of knowing what race she was in particular. I appraised her, given that it was only natural in our current circumstances, but I wasn't able to get anything out of it. She must've had a skill or item powerful enough to totally ward off the effects of even my Eye of Empyrea.

I instead had to rely on using my experiences to discern that she was some sort of cat-related beastkin.

"I can't appraise her, so I can't say for sure, but it looks like she's probably a White Catkin or something," I pondered.

"White Catkin. Doesn't exist," Fran telepathically replied.

"Shit, seriously?"

"Nn. Know all catkin types since also catkin. No white."

"Right..."

Wait, so what is she then? Is she not a cat? Nah, she has to be a cat based on how her ears and tail look. Maybe she's like a White Pantherkin or White Tigerkin or something, assuming they exist?

"Can tell already evolved," she remarked conclusively.

"Huh. Well then..."

"Nn... But strange. Can't tell species."

She could not only stop me from appraising her, but also somehow had the ability to prevent other beastkin from figuring out her precise species.

The girl briskly walked towards us as I found myself lost in thought. She was giving off an extremely hostile aura, but not the murderous kind. We decided to take a wait-and-see approach and hear her out for the time being. That said, we weren't going to let her approach us any more than she already had.

"Stop there," Fran narrowed her eyes as she issued a warning.

"...I need not for you to tell me that," the other girl replied.

Much to my surprise, she stopped right where we told her to. Thinking about it, I realized it made sense. There was no reason for her to step within range of our attacks.

That action alone was more than enough to inform me that the girl was a skilled fighter. With a single glance she had not only discerned that Fran was strong, but also accurately estimated her effective range.

Her eyes widened as she took a second look at Fran. I couldn't tell whether it was because she'd realized Fran was the Black Lightning Princess, or if it was simply because she was an evolved Black Catkin.

I wanted Fran to ask her who she was, but that had to wait. There were more important issues to be addressed.

"Approaching person, your party member?"

"Indeed."

A second individual emerged from a bush behind the girl as she answered Fran's question.

"Please don't rush on ahead of me, my lady," the individual rebuked.

A wave of shock coursed through my brain the moment I saw her. The sheer impact I felt was on par with the one I'd felt when I saw the Leviathan just the other day.

I was so surprised I couldn't stop myself from muttering under my breath.

"Is that... a maid...?"

Chapter 267

Mare and Kuina

The individual that had pushed her way through the bushes was undoubtedly a maid. Wait. Weren't we supposed to be in the midst of a haunt containing C ranked monsters? The hell is a maid doing here? If there was a limit to how out of place one could possibly be, then this maid had just exceeded the hell out of it.

Her being a maid wasn't really the part that surprised me the most. I'd already met many maids post reincarnation.

I was as surprised as I was because the maid before me was a whole cut above the rest. She wasn't wearing the traditional servant wear one normally saw on the maids around these parts. Rather, she wore a less sexualized version of the frilly, lacy, gothic-lolita style dress you'd typically see in anime and manga. Her clothes clearly put cuteness well above functionality.

The dress, whose main colours were white and navy, came with an equally fancy apron attached to it. The bottom part of the dress extended almost all the way towards the ground. It gave her a really prim and proper kinda feel, which *really* got me going. The girl wearing the maid uniform had a well proportioned figure and clear body lines. Her curves reminded me greatly of Fujiko's. [1] Moreover, her eyes made her seem cold. She was just the type of maid I liked. Her long chestnut hair was styled into three distinct braids. Her long bangs had been pushed aside to put her forehead on display.

Her nose was decorated with a pair of thick-lensed glasses. They were heavy, and if you looked at her straight on, it almost looked like they were falling off her face.

Man, round glasses are the best.

There was no doubt in my mind that her glasses were sexy as hell. Her ears were black and resembled those of a horse's. They were a bit difficult to see, in part because of the brim she was wearing and in part because they'd been pushed back such that they blended in with her hair. At first, I'd thought that they were just accessories.

Unlike her companion, the maid could actually be appraised.

General Information

Name: Kuina

Age: 29

Species: Beastkin (Grey Tapirkin / Phantom Dream Tapirkin)

Class: First Class Maid

Status Level: 49/99

HP: 539

MP: 651

STR: 297

VIT: 230

AGI: 231

INT: 333

MGC: 311

DEX: 336

Skills

Assassination: Lv 7

Espionage: Lv 8

Healing Magic: MAX

Recovery Magic: Lv 4

Court Etiquette: Lv 6

Presence Detection: Lv 4

Presence Concealment: Lv 8

Illusion Magic: MAX

Greater Illusion Magic: Lv 2

Restrain: Lv 6

Sewing: Lv 7

Murderous Intent Detection: Lv 8

Silenced Action: Lv 7

Purification Magic: Lv 4

Resistance to Abnormal Status: Lv 6

Interrogation: Lv 7

Resistance to Mental Abnormalities: Lv 8

Laundry: Lv 8

Cleaning: MAX

Throwing Arts: Lv 9

Throwing Techniques: Lv 8

Knowledge of Poisons: Lv 8

Poison Perception: Lv 8
Magic Resist: Lv 4
Magic Perception: Lv 6
Magic Absorption: Lv 6
Water Magic: Lv 5
Cooking: Lv 8
Alchemy: Lv 4
Ignore Pain
Iron Will
Magic Mastery

Innate Skills

Awakening
A Maid's Prudence
Phantom Dream Matrix

Titles

Assassin Killer
Illusion Mage
One That has Experienced and Surpassed Hell
Lord of Cleaning
Royal Maid

Equipment

Divine Silk Maid's Uniform
Divine Silk Gloves
Ring of Sorcery
Illusion Sealing Bracelet

She was pretty strong, seeing as how she'd evolved. She looked like she was more than fit for combat, or rather assassination, even though she was a maid.

Classifying her in adventurer terms, she was at least as strong as a B ranker. I wouldn't be surprised if she were an A ranker either, given that I had no idea how large the powerboost she'd get from awakening was.

"My lady, I've told you time and time again to slow down. I can't keep up with you, and it's dangerous for you to dash on ahead of me," rebuked the maid.

“I do apologize, Kuina. Chasing down my prey caused me to lose myself,” replied the little girl.

“And who might this newfound acquaintance of yours be?”

The maid, Kuina, turned her eyes in Fran’s direction. Her gaze remained cold, but it didn’t seem like she was judging Fran. Instead, it seemed more like she was simply sleepy, but at the same time, she gave off a mysterious feel. The lack of emotion within made it difficult to guess her thoughts. Her eyes were similar to Fran’s, but gave the impression that she had even less interest in other people.

In fact, she didn’t seem surprised even though she’d stared Fran down. Of all the beastkin we met she gave the smallest reaction to Fran’s evolution.

“That... is surprising, so much so that I almost tripped and fell,” the maid remarked.

“Indeed. Never before have I seen your face decorated with such a deep expression of surprise.”

Apparently, she was not actually uninterested in Fran. Her emotions just didn’t show on her face. I was honestly impressed that her companion was even capable of discerning her emotions, let alone their intensity.

“You, name yourself!” the silver haired girl commanded.

I wanted Fran to tell her that it was rude to ask another’s name without first providing one’s own, but—

“Rather, it would be more appropriate for me to provide my own name first. I am Mare, and I allow you to refer to me as such!” the girl that had named herself Mare declared in an imposing, self-important tone.

“And I’m Kuina. Nice to meet you.”

Mare placed both hands on her hips and took a proud stance as she declared herself, whereas Kuina instead performed a clean, crisp bow as she gave her name. They seemed really disorganized given the disparity between the manner in which they introduced themselves, but didn’t really come off as bad people nonetheless.

“C ranked adventurer, Fran. This, Urushi,” Fran replied in her usual tone. She was

clearly undaunted.

“Woof!”

“Fran...? So you really are the Black Lightning Princess,” Mare nodded, as if to confirm her own suspicions.

“Nn.”

She knew about the Black Lightning Princess. So wait, does that mean she’s an adventurer? She’s got a maid though, so she’s probably not... Is she a merchant or something? No, that doesn’t seem quite right...

“I never would have thought that we would meet you under circumstances like these,” said Kuina. “I would have liked us to meet in a more peaceful environment.”

“That reminds me! How dare you rob me of my prey!?” exclaimed Mare, outraged.

“Prey?”

“I am speaking of the manticore that you slew! I was in the midst of hunting it down. You snatched the most enjoyable part of the hunt from right under my nose!” Mare shouted indignantly as she pointed towards the roasted manticore corpse lying right by us. Apparently, the manticore hadn’t been in our way because it’d lost its territory but rather because it had chosen to flee from Mare and her maid.

Under normal circumstances, my first reaction would be to accuse Mare of bullshitting, but I was pretty sure that she and Kuina would be able to handle a manticore without issue.

There was no debating that we’d stolen their kill. But at the same time, it was also their fault for letting their prey run from them in the first place. Still, we would’ve likely also began complaining if we were in their shoes.

“I’d prefer not turning this into any sort of major conflict if possible. What say you, Fran?”

“Nn...? Can just give manticore?” she replied nonchalantly.

“You sure?”

"Don't mind."

I personally had no problem giving them the materials if it meant avoiding conflict. The only issue would be that I've already absorbed the core. Cores were valuable to adventurers, and given that there was obviously no way we could've possibly sold it already, I wasn't sure we were going to be able to talk our way through the current circumstances.

"Then can give you manticore materials," offered Fran.

"Keep them. I need them not." Mare flatly rejected her.

"My lady, I beg you to reconsider," interjected Kuina. "We do require them given our funds are beginning to run dry."

"...I do admit that there is no harm in procuring them. However, they are but an extra. I was more interested in the slaying of the manticore and the experience I would gain, as I am quite close to leveling up." Mare complained.

Oh, so they were grinding. That made sense. If Mare was anywhere near as strong as Kuina, then she'd need to defeat something at least as strong as a manticore if she wanted to gain any significant amount of experience.

"Your fault. Let prey escape," pointed out Fran.

Mare grumbled in dissatisfaction, her face scrunching up.

"I believe the Black Lightning Princess is in the right here, My Lady," Kuina noted.

"...I understand," Mare relented. "...But I won't forgive you lest you engage me in a spar!"

Again, Mare spoke in a cocky, self-important tone, but I didn't mind it. At first I thought it was because of how pretty she looked, but Fran felt the same way I did, so that probably wasn't it. Mysteriously, Fran didn't feel repulsed by it like she often did when other nobles did the same.

Was it just because her cuteness seemed to overrule her stubbornness? Or because her pride almost seemed a natural fit for her? Of course, I don't feel the urge to suddenly kneel before her and obey her every whim, but I did feel like nodding along

and agreeing was the natural thing to do.

“Interested,” said Fran.

“I’m not sure that’s a request you would typically spring on someone so suddenly, My Lady,” Kuina remarked.

“A duel with the famous Black Lightning Princess,” said Mare, ignoring her maid, “should more than suffice to make up for the loss of the manticore. What say you, Black Lightning Princess?”

I didn’t even need to hear Fran’s answer to know exactly what she was thinking. Her eyes were blazing in a way that they only ever did when she was in battle mode. It was completely self-evident that she was going to comply with Mare’s request.

“Got it.”

“A splendid response!” said Mare, happily. “Let us find a more convenient place to spar. This area is not exactly what I would claim the most suitable.”

“Nn!”

Oh well, I guess it’s fine. Neither Kuina or Mare had lied, and neither was giving off the impression that they wanted to kill her, so why not.

Chapter 268

Dueling Mare

We followed Mare and Kuina out the Scorpion Lion Forest so Fran could spar with Mare. Our party was so strong we instantly obliterated all the goblins and other weaker creatures we encountered on sight. Mare and Fran would immediately charge at any unfortunate monsters they could find. They competed for kills so intensely that I felt not even a manticores could survive a hit from the two combined.

We negotiated to keep all the cores of the monsters defeated along the way and relinquished all the remaining materials to Mare and Kuina. They didn't particularly mind since all they really wanted was money. Kuina was responsible for transporting all the monsters we defeated. She put the materials into an interesting sort of item bag. It had a small opening, but would suck things inside and had no issues storing things larger than it.

The two catkins chattered and debated their favourite foods as they walked. Kuina, on the other hand, mostly stayed silent. She instead focused on examining the surroundings for any potential danger. Her ears would move about and occasionally twitch. It really was hard to read her expressions though. I couldn't tell what she was thinking at all.

We journeyed through the Scorpion Lion Forest effectively unhindered, taking about two hours to pass through it. Exiting the forest, we found ourselves greeted by a wide, open plain.

"Shall we begin!?" Mare suggested.

"Nn!" said Fran as she reached for my hilt.

The two warriors, both exhilarated by the idea of a spar, turned to face each other as they prepared to draw their weapons—only to be interrupted.

"Stop right there," said Kuina as she grabbed onto Mare's head with an iron-claw grip.

"What now!?" shouted Mare.

“You’ll bother everyone else that wishes to use this route should you two spar right here” said Kuina, adjusting the rim of her glasses with her free hand. “Please move a bit further into the plains so you won’t be in anyone’s way.”

I had to admit, she had a point. I highly doubted that the duel would end with just a clash of blades. The two would likely destroy the road if we did not relocate.

And so we continued walking for another ten minutes and stopped once we were sure that there was nothing important nearby.

“Okay, this will suffice,” said Kuina. “Remember two things: do not kill each other, and do not awaken.”

“That much is obvious!” Mare complained.

“Nn!”

“But you needn’t hold back *too* much. I can heal both of you even if you bring each other to the verge of death.”

Mare laughed. “I can hardly wait! This will truly be a test of my skill!”

“Same.”

“Will that wolf be joining you in combat? I mind not if it participates.”

“Numerical advantage?”

“That is not a concern.” Mare drew the blade she carried on her back, raised it to the sky, and shouted, “Llinde!”

A red light radiated from its blade and from that light materialized a dragon.

“Kyuooohhh!”

“Cute,” was Fran’s first response.

It was fairly small, but a dragon nonetheless. If I had to guess, I would assume it to be a child.

“Monster Weapon?”

“Nuhahahaha! Amazing, is it not?” replied Mare. “My sword is none other than Llinde, the Dragonblade!”

Mare’s ability to block me from appraising her didn’t apply to her sword. I was able to appraise both it and the dragon that had emerged from it.

General Stats

Name: Dragonblade Llinde

Attack: 963

MP: 669

Durability: 887

Magical Conductivity: B+

Skills

Flame Resistance

Self-Repair

Summon Dragonsoul

T-The fuck, that thing is strong! Hell, it has even more attack than I do! And it’s a Monster Weapon to boot? Shit, I mean it’s not as impressive as a Godblade, but it was still without a doubt a high class magic sword.

B-But I’m still *totally* the better weapon. I-I have skills and stuff. I-I’m definitely not worse j-just because it’s got a dragon.

General Information

Name: Llinde

Species: Dragon (Dragonsoul)

Status:

HP: 887

MP: 669

STR: 120

VIT: 100

AGI: 300

INT: 200
MGC: 400
DEX: 100

Skills

Flame Breath: Lv 6
Fang Techniques: Lv 4
Fang Arts: Lv 5
Presence Detection: Lv 4
Regeneration: Lv 5
Resistance to Abnormal Status: Lv 5
Resistance to Mental Abnormalities: Lv 5
Charge: Lv 6
Heat Detection: Lv 5
Flight: Lv 8
Fire Magic: Lv 5
Roar: Lv 4
Dragon Magic: Lv 5
Reinforced Scales
Flame Nullification
Magic Manipulation

Unique Skills

Principle of Flame: Lv 6 [1]

Description: N/A

The reason the dragon lacked a description was likely because it was associated with the blade and lived within it. That aside, it was decently strong. It wasn't a match for Urushi, but it was powerful enough to be considered a D ranked threat. Its unique skill apparently allowed it to manipulate any flames in its vicinity.

"Llinde here will take that wolf of yours on."

"Got it," said Fran. "Urushi, no losing."

"Woof!"

"The very same applies to you, Llinde! Show them what it means to have a dragon's

pride!”

“Kyuooohhh!”

“This is a spar, so no hard feelings from either of you regardless of the outcome,” said Kuina. “Do I make myself clear?”

“Naturally,” Mare affirmed.

“Nn”

And so, the two began their duel. They did not immediately charge at each other right out of the gate. The match began with neither fighter willing to make the first move.

The two instead stared each other down with their blades raised. They made only the slightest of feints to keep each other in check. The moment I thought the two would be forever stuck in a deadlock, Mare suddenly charged.

“Haaaahhh!”

“Fmph!”

The sharp ring of steel on steel echoed throughout the plains as the two young girls let loose their battlecries.

Mare was quite the swordsman. She was able to cross blades with Fran and hold her ground through a short exchange of blows. But unfortunately for her, Fran held the Sword Lord Arts skill, which gave her the edge and allowed her to gradually overwhelm her foe through sheer technique.

“Hahahah! Impressive, Black Lightning Princess! I expect no less from a tribe whose name has been carved into legend!”

“Also impressed. Not bad.”

“Frustrating as it is, I must admit that my skill fails to surpass your own. I’ve no choice but to up the ante.”

“Bring it on!”

The two seemed to be getting along; they somehow found the time to trade words despite being engaged in a furious exchange of blows.

Mare attacked Fran with flame magic, but the black catkin managed to ward off her spell through the use of just her sword and a barrier before returning fire with spells of her own. Fran was the more agile type of fighter, so her attacks came in the form of a relentless barrage. On the other hand, Mare was more a strength type. She launched fewer attacks, but each was much more powerful. The two girls smiled as they unhesitatingly launched attacks that each carried lethal force. It was clear that both did not want to yield to the other.

Some of Mare's flame-based attacks would come without any chants. I couldn't tell if these attacks were magical spells or if they were instead a trait of her species. I suspected it was the latter, but at the same time I highly doubted it. She was too white to be a Red Catkin, after all.

Thinking about Red Catkin, I remembered that the Beast Lord had once mentioned that he had a daughter, but I highly doubted said daughter would be gallivanting around doing adventurer-like things with a maid by her side...

Wait... that does seem possible seeing as how the Beast Lord is who he is...

I looked towards Urushi and his foe.

"Grrr!"

"Kyuuooh!"

The wolf and dragon were engaged in a high speed battle. The two were using the wide open space they were given to its fullest, trying to chase each other down without being caught. I couldn't help but be surprised at Llinde's speed. It could generate bursts of speed that exceeded Urushi at his fastest even though the latter had a higher agility stat.

Of course, its ability to fly contributed in part to its speed, but the bigger part seemed to be attributed to the flames that would trail behind it whenever it accelerated. It seemed to be using something similar to the Burnia spell. [2]

That said, speed was the only thing the dragonling had on Urushi. The wolf was superior in every other category. He held the advantage from start to end even though

he was holding back. I was pretty sure he'd eventually win if I just left him be, so I turned my attention back over to Fran.

She and Mare were still happily exchanging blows, but the winner was already clear. Mare had substantial wounds all over, but Fran had only suffered a few light scratches. Mare's hands were tied. Fran was both the better swordsman and the better mage of the two. There was simply nothing she could do.

Realizing that, Mare used her flame magic to create an opening and distanced herself from her opponent. It seemed that she still had something up her sleeve. Fran defended against the spell, and had more than enough liberty to pursue, but stood her ground. She wanted to see what Mare was planning to do.

Mare's eyes were filled with exhilaration. The battle was giving her an adrenaline rush, one that caused to raise her voice and loose a bestial howl.

"...Coming."

A massive amount of magical energy began gathering within Mare's body. There was so much of it that it caused the air around her to begin crackling with energy. Was she awakening? Or maybe using some other skill?

I couldn't tell. I only knew that she was trying something big, so I focused my attention on her in hopes of figuring out exactly what it was.

Fran's expression was identical to Mare's. She was excited to see what would happen next, to see the challenge she would have to overcome—but it didn't. Something appeared behind Mare and caused the magical energy she started building up to disperse.

"Ngyaaah!"

"Geez. Were you seriously about to go ahead and do *that*, My Lady?"

"K-Kuina..."

Kuina had suddenly appeared behind Mare and dumped a large volume of magically created water over her head. The sudden wetness caused the startled catkin to scream and leap before turning back towards Kuina with a resentful gaze.

Naturally, I had picked up on Kuina's actions ahead of time. I had my guard up against her just in case. She'd suddenly disappeared using what I assumed to be illusion magic, but I did not mind it because she directed her next actions towards Mare and not Fran. Fran had also picked up on the maid's movements. Mare, however, didn't. All her focus had been directed towards Fran.

"And what exactly did I say about attempting to kill your opponent, My Lady?"

"B-But I was going to lose if I did not attempt drastic measures..." whimpered Mare.

"And why exactly are you being so obstinate about winning or losing a spar?"

"Mmph..."

"Well?"

"V-Very well, I apologize!"

And so, that was how the spar ended with the pair apologizing to Fran. She was a bit disappointed with how things ended, but still decently satisfied, so she ended up letting things be. It was a good place to call it quits. Fran was starting to get hot headed as well. We managed to avoid having her and Mare actually try to kill each other, so this was probably as well as things could've possibly ended.

[1] Lit. Principle of fire manipulation, but that sounds lame af

[2] Recall, this is the spell that Fran uses to accelerate.

Chapter 269

The Princess

“Next time I will surely win! You wait and see!”

“Kyuuiii!”

With those parting words we separated from Mare and Kuina and made our way towards the town of Roserraccoon. We asked them to come with us but they declined. For some reason the two of them wanted to avoid the town. Maybe they were involved in some sort of incident? Regardless we decided to let matters be and head towards the town ourselves.

“They were surely a lively pair.”

“Nn. Will win next time.”

“Woof!”

“Nn. Both of us.”

Our encounter was definitely a fruitful one. I got to see a hella gorgeous maid and Fran met Mare, the first person in her age group capable of putting up a good fight. We won the spar, and Mare didn't seem like the type of fighter to pull her punches, but I wasn't certain we would have won a serious death match. She was clearly holding onto some final trump card at the end. This fight will definitely encourage Fran's growth as a warrior down the future. My only worry is that she may become too much of a battle junkie.

After walking for a distance, we spotted walls rising out of the horizon.

“Master, town spotted.”

“Yeah and it's pretty big too. The walls are impressive. This is probably Roserraccoon.”

“Nn.”

As we approached the town we noticed a commotion outside the walls. Although it wasn't strange for a town as large as this to be noisy, it was strange to see so many people milling around outside the walls. As we approached we saw that all the people were adventurers. There were about thirty of them, all trying to board the same horned carriage. Fran called out to one of the adventurers.

"Something happen?"

"Hah? The hell do ya want ki- WHOA HOLY SHIT!"

The man took a glance at Fran and cut himself short. He froze, one foot on the horned carriage, the other still on the ground, his eyes bulging out of their sockets.

"Well?"

"My ba-" he coughed. "My apologies."

He clearly cleaned up his act the moment he saw Fran. He probably realized she evolved.

"Okay?" asked Fran.

"Yes," he said. "We're currently tasked with escorting a noble. Our destination is a town down south."

"Adventurers for guards? Not soldiers?"

"Yeah. All the knights and soldiers are headed to the border. There aren't any to spare."

"Understood."

It seems there were some extenuating circumstances in this case. Normally a noble will be escorted by knights and soldiers unless they wanted to travel incognito. In that case they would hire adventurers as escorts, but having a full entourage of thirty people was antithetical to staying under the radar. I urged Fran to continue questioning.

"So many people, cause trouble?" asked Fran.

"Well this amount is to be expected given we are escorting the princess herself," he

said.

“Princess, here?”

“Yeah. The guildmaster decided to go over the top with this escort commission.”

It seemed the guildmaster was trying to please the royal family by sending the princess a large group of guards.

“In fact you can see her over there,” the adventurer said.

We looked over towards the direction he indicated. There stood a girl in a very ostentatious, out of place dress.

Maybe we should go talk to her... We are pretty heavily indebted to the Beast Lord, after all.

That said her entourage was giving the surroundings quite the stink-eye.

“*What do?*” asked Fran telepathically.

“*We might as well get closer and check things out.*” I said.

“Nn.”

Fran thanked the adventurer and we headed towards the princess. As we approached we suddenly felt something terribly wrong. A chill ran down our spines. It felt similar to when we were made subject to Coerced Camaraderie in Ulmutt. But maybe not that specifically. Were we appraised by the princess’ guards? Probably not since the sensation was very brief.

“*Fran back off a bit.*”

“Nn.”

We backed away about twenty meters and the offputting sensation disappeared. I then used magic perception and found some sort of active skill covering the entirety of the princess’ surroundings. I decided to try appraising the situation. I had to be very careful in case one of the guards had appraisal detection, I didn’t want Fran to be accused of a serious breach of privacy. It’s best to stay out of trouble.

I first made a copy of myself while still hiding behind Fran. I switched places with that copy so it looked like I was still on Fran's back. Then I shrunk all the way down to about the size of a ping pong ball. Finally I teleported to right above the princess. Making myself smaller was harder than making myself larger, so I probably couldn't keep this form for long. I recalled what Kuina did and made an illusion to blend into the sky behind me. I was able to get an appraisal but what I saw was really odd.

General Information

Name: Nemea Narasimha

Age: 16

Species: Red Catkin/Golden Lionkin

Class: Swordsman

Status Level: 45/99

HP: 198

MP: 129

STR: 181

VIT: 188

AGI: 202

INT: 147

MGC: 189

DEX: 110

Skills

(Acting: Lv 7)

Singing: Lv 5

Court Etiquette: Lv 6

Presence Detection: Lv 5

Sword Techniques: Lv 5

Sword Arts: Lv 5

Shield Techniques: Lv 2

Shield Arts: Lv 4

Poison Perception: Lv 4

Fire Magic: Lv 5

Dancing: Lv 5

Innate Skills

Awakening

Titles

Princess (Royal Guard)

Equipment

Divine Silk Dress

Appraisal Disguise Ring

Bracelet of Substitution

Why the hell is there some stuff in parenthesis? There's a bunch of notable stuff like acting, royal guard, and even an appraisal disguise ring. Is the stuff in parenthesis things that are disguised that my max appraisal and Eye of Empyrea can see through? I can't be certain since there might be stuff hidden behind an even stronger layer of disguise. Another confusing part is the "Princess (Royal Guard)". I can't tell if it means a guard of royal blood or a guard that specifically attends a person of royalty. I wanted to investigate further but appraisal disguise obscured any further details.

Either way, the princess looked really weak considering she was *that* Beast Lord's daughter. Though, I guess it's a bit unfair to compare her to someone that's S ranked. Besides, she's actually pretty good for a sixteen year old. The only real issue I saw was that her skill levels were low compared to her status level. Maybe someone carried the hell out of her? I highly doubted that the Beast Lord would powerlevel his daughter but that was the only way to explain the discrepancy.

Wait! Wasn't she supposed to be fifteen? Did her birthday just pass?

I concluded that the source of my malaise was the appraisal disguise ring. She probably was not someone too suspicious given that the guildmaster was showing her out. Appraising some people around her, I found them to be court ladies and attendants so that made things seem even more legitimate. There likely wasn't any danger in approaching her.

I slowly made my way back to Fran.

"Looks like we're in the clear. We can go greet her"

"Nn. Got it" she replied.

Since there currently was only one evolved black catkin and it was well known that it

was a little girl, they should instead realize she was Fran. The Black Lightning Princess nickname was a good as identification and provided us a decent social standing in these parts.

We approached the princess and this time got close enough for her to notice us.

“Oh. Are you perhaps the Black Lightning Princess?” she asked.

“Nn.”

“Oi watch your mouth!” a guard shouted. “You are to address Her Highness with respect!”

Apparently he didn’t like how curtly Fran responded. But the princess reproached her guard.

“Stand down!” she said. “Do you recall that my father specifically ordered us to receive her graciously?”

Apparently the Beast Lord already arranged for stuff ahead of time. Shiet, thanks dude.

Chapter 270

Assassin Discovered

“Normally I would hold a proper reception for you but unfortunately currently we are in the midst of an emergency,” said the princess.

“Nn. Don’t mind.”

“Thank you so much for understanding.”

The princess bowed apologetically as we watched the adventurers around her scramble to board the horned carriage. It was clear they needed to depart as soon as possible.

Upon getting closer I saw that she looked nothing like the current Beast Lord.

She’s also kinda weak, so I doubt she’s really his daughter. She’s probably a body double, I think?

That would explain her bizzare status page. All evolved beastkin should receive a species specific skill upon awakening. For example, a black tigerkin would get Lightning Rush and a black heavenly tigerkin would get Brilliant Lightning Rush. The Beast Lord is a golden flame lionkin and I saw he had Golden Flame of Extinction, so this gold lionkin should have had something similar.

Hmm... Nothing quite seems to add up. There are too many inconsistencies. She has to be a body double or something.

I doubted that the guildmaster would fall for such a disguise. He was likely aware of the situation. The extravagant escort he commissioned was probably intended to help sell the story and trick people into thinking that the royal guard really was the princess. With this level of preparation, it was impossible for anyone that didn’t already know her to tell that she was a fake, especially if they saw her treated and addressed as a member of the royal family.

“Master?”

“Nah, it’s nothing. I’m just thinking about the princess and how she’s probably a fake.”

“Fake? What do?”

“Good question. Honestly, I dunno.”

There was zero benefit towards pointing out the princess was a fake. We would probably jeopardize some important mission, piss off the Beastkin’s Country, and have our backs marked as a result.

In the end, we just saw the “princess” off. She gave us a light bow, boarded her personal carriage, and then quickly departed with the rest of her entourage. She had only exchanged a few words with Fran, but we didn’t mind. If anything, it worked in our favour. We wanted to get the capital ASAP and being asked to have tea with the princess or even guard her would have been a bother.

“Alright. Let’s go to the guild.”

“Nn.”

And so we turned towards town but Fran suddenly stopped as we found ourselves upon the town’s gate.

“What’s wrong Fran?”

“Master, something there.”

“Where?”

She pointed towards one of the gate’s supports. There, I picked up a strange presence, like a monster trying to escape detection. The person in question was quite skilled, but not enough to escape Fran’s senses. The only reason why I didn’t pick up on him myself was because he wasn’t hostile. He was just trying to hide, it seemed.

Wow, I’m impressed she actually noticed him.

I decided to scope the mystery man out since he was clearly beyond your average back alley punk.

“Wait here,” I told Fran.

“Nn.”

I teleported closer to better investigate. I found the person in an alley beside the gate. He was hiding in the shadows and using a skill to further hide his presence. I quickly appraised him.

Hmm. So he's an assassin.

The man's name was Genro and his class was assassin. He must have been a veteran given his Noble Killer title. I would have ignored him if he was just another punk or hired sword but someone of his caliber shouldn't be left to his own devices. I decided to capture and forcefully interrogate him. I used telekinesis to freeze him in place, then used earth magic to mold the ground and constrain his lower half.

Fuck yeah! Surprise attack success!

“W-What!?” he exclaimed.

“I've caught you.” I spoke to him telepathically. *“Don't try to resist.”*

“Don't fuck wi—”

“You won't find me. Don't bother trying”

“Kuh...”

I was actually just hiding on the other side of the wall behind him. But being a sword, I didn't get caught by skills capable of searching for living creatures. Only people with high leveled magic detection skills could track me down.

“Now let's get down to business, Genro.”

“Wha-?!”

“Don't try to lie. I already know everything about you.”

“You have appraisal?!”

“Why are you here? To assassinate the princess?”

“...”

“Silence, huh?”

“...Guh.”

Genro bit into his mouth. He had a poisoned capsule embedded into his tooth. As his face turned purple and his pupils began to widen,

“Nice try asshole. Antidote!”

I healed him.

“What!?” he shouted.

“That was a strong poison. But too bad my healing magic is stronger.”

“-are you kidding me?!”

“And don’t bother biting your tongue. I can heal that too.”

“...”

“Now answer my questions. I’ll have to get rough if you don’t.”

“...”

“Well, you asked for it.”

And so I beat him close to death. He didn’t actually tell me anything, but I was able to put together what happened by using Principle of Falsehood whenever he said “no” or “I don’t know.” The results? Genro was an assassin from the Kingdom of Bashar and he was actively targeting Princess Nemea. His plan was to chase down the convoy and kill her. He apparently thinks *that* princess is real. That body double must be doing a good job if they can draw people of his caliber out. Genro moaned in pain. Now what to do with a half-dead assassin?

I should probably hand him over to the guards if I can find a way to call them over.

While carefully aiming high into the sky, I fired a flame-based explosion above the

town. The sound of the blast reverberated throughout the town.

Guards will definitely come running after that. Yep, in fact here comes three of them.

“You there! Freeze!” they shouted.

“Yeah yeah I know.”

I had made a human shaped doppelganger beforehand. I raised its arms as if to surrender and then gestured towards Genro’s body.

“This guy is a Basharian assassin.” I spoke through the doppelganger.

“What? How do you know this?”

“He was after Princess Nemea so I captured him. I’m turning him over to you. Have fun~”

“Wait what do you mea- holy crap he’s vanishing!?”

The guards, stunned, watched my doppelganger melt into thin air. After blinking a few times, they suddenly remembered they had an alleged assassin to deal with. They looked down and saw his hands and feet were already bound, courtesy of me, of course. After watching them take the assassin in, I pat myself on the back for a job well done.

Welp. Back to Fran I go.

Chapter 271

Roserracoon's Guildmaster

After handing off the assassin to the guards, I returned to Fran. Together, we made our way to the Adventurers' Guild. We entered and found the inside to be unusually quiet.

Well a whole load of adventurers just left with the princess so I guess it makes sense for it to be empty.

"Ey! 'Elcome!"

A loud voice called out to us from the counter. The receptionist was a hearty, middle aged man with a rolled up headband around his forehead, one that would not look out of place at a fisherman's market by the wharf. We approached the counter.

"Interestin'. You the Black Lightning Princess, lassie?" he asked.

"Nn. Me."

"I knew it! Good to have you 'ere!"

He nodded as he examined Fran's guild card.

Goddamn, this dude is way too lively!

"So what can I help ya with today?" he asked.

"Want to know how to get to capital," said Fran.

"The capital? Oh, ya wanna go to Vestia? Normally, ya wanna find yourself a horned carriage."

"Normally?"

"Yeah." He scratched his head. "They've all been rented out for the time being."

“Princess?”

“Yeah. I told the guildmaster he was spendin’ way too much on the adventurers and the horned carriages, but he didn’t listen to me. Our guildmaster’s the type that really likes to please his higher ups, ya see.”

The guildmaster employed all the adventurers and horned carriages available just to ingratiate himself to the royals.

“But honestly, I can’t really say anythin’ too negative ‘bout it. I can get why he’s goin’ all out for our royals, y’see.”

“Why?” asked Fran.

“O’course. The country’s been doin’ real well since the current Beast Lord took over. He ‘imself used to be an adventurer, so he’s been givin’ the guild a good cut of benefits too.”

At first, I’d thought that the guildmaster was just a tool, but it turned out there was a bit more to it. He and many other adventurers simply adored the Beast Lord and the adventurer-benefiting policies he stood behind.

But will Roserracoon be okay with so many adventurers and horned carriages missing? What if there is an emergency?

“Guild empty, okay?” asked Fran.

“Haha don’t ya worry! We can deal with it lassie” he replied. “This city’s a hotspot as far as adventurers go. They gather here from all over the country, ‘specially if they’re planning on makin’ use of The Shortcut. Give it 10 days or so, and we’ll be just as full as we were this mornin’”

“Got it,” Fran nodded.

“We’ll ask for reinforcements from the guild in the capital,” he said. “Couple o’ strong guys would come and keep us covered for a bit. Our guildmaster’s pretty capable too.”

“Guildmaster, strong?” asked Fran.

“Yeah. He’s gotta be to be a guildmaster,” he said. “Plus we’re in this situation cuz of

his selfishness, so we're gonna work 'im to the bone haha!"

Seems like my worries about the lack of manpower were needless.

"So," he said. "A normal horse carriage takes 'round five to six days to reach Vestia, ya see."

"Route complicated?" asked Fran.

"Route? Naw it's basically a straight line from 'ere to Vestia. There's even a highway built for carriages, so ya can't get lost."

"Okay. Thanks."

"You plannin' to head over by yerself?"

"Nn."

"Well, if even half the rumors 'bout ya are true, then you'd be there sooner without a carriage."

I don't know what these rumors are but if they are basically equating us with an A rank adventurer then they're probably accurate enough.

"They be some crazy rumours. They sa—" the receptionist was about to continue talking, but suddenly stopped himself short.

"Something wrong?" asked Fran.

"Seems like the guildmaster's callin' for ya," he said.

"Nn?"

"Our guildmaster here's a wind mage. 'e can send his voice to specific people."

Huh, interesting.

It definitely sounds plausible if you can control vibrations in the air. Although you'd probably need a good amount of skill in order to make the message clearly reach the person you're targeting. It seems the guildmaster uses this technique to give orders to

people around the guild.

“Just go upstairs?” asked Fran.

“Yeah. Sorry in advance,” he said. “If our guildmaster says somethin’ stupid just smack ‘im.”

“Got it.”

“But he’s not a bad person at heart so don’t worry.”

Those words alone gave me a rough understanding of his character. We went upstairs and entered the indicated door only to find a frivolous looking man standing beyond the doorway.

“Hello there!” he said with a cheap smile. “I am Emyute, the guildmaster of Rosserracoon’s adventurer guild and a Wind Soul Tanukikin.”

“Rank C adventurer, Fran. Black Heavenly Tigerkin.”

“So you’re the legendary beastkin? This is an amazing moment for me. You definitely look as strong as you look cute, so I can see why the Beast Lord approves of you.”

He seems to be an evolved tanukikin, and from the species name, he is a subspecies that specializes in wind magic. Overall the receptionist was right about him. He seemed lighthearted and kind of annoying but not a bad person at heart.

“Had business with me?” asked Fran.

“Straight to the point I see,” he said. “To be honest I wanted a favor from you.”

“Favor?”

“Yes. You see we just captured an foreign assassin. The problem is, his target was the princess.”

“Princess Nemea?”

“Exactly.”

Does he mean the assassin I just caught? Holy shit, information in this town travels really freaking fast. I really didn't think information would have gotten all the way from the guards to the guildmaster even if there were no delays up the chain of command.

"You see, we have a magical item for communications in the guard room," he said. "Everything they report goes to me. I just got this information a few minutes ago so your timing was absolutely perfect."

"So, need what?" asked Fran.

"It's simple. Deliver this letter to the capital. You can treat it as a proper quest."

"Okay to deliver to guild in capital?"

"You can move much faster than a horse-drawn carriage, right?"

We're being directly asked by the guildmaster himself so why not? We're going to the capital anyway and doing this will put the guildmaster in our debt.

"We should accept," I said.

"Got it," said Fran. "Will accept quest."

"Thank you so much!" said the guildmaster. "You're doing me such a huge favor. Inside this letter is a request for more escorts for the princess so the faster the better okay?"

"But guarded by lots of adventurers already?" asked Fran.

"Hmm... well I guess it's okay to tell you since I want this letter delivered for sure. But no telling other people, okay? An oath of silence will be included in this quest."

"No problem" said Fran. "Will swear on tail."

"The truth is that the princess that just left town is a fake. The real princess is elsewhere."

Booyah! I fucking called it!

Sending thirty adventurers and all those horned carriages with the fake princess

seemed kind of questionable. It turned out it really was all a ploy to make the fake princess seem more real. The assassin I captured had some doubts. There was a chance that other assassins may have started catching on as well.

“Delivering the letter is also for the safety of the real princess,” said the guildmaster.

“Got it.”

“That aside, would you care to join me for a meal before departing?”

“Not hurried?”

“That is that and this is this. It would not do for you to travel on an empty stomach. Above all else I get to have a meal with a lovely lady!”

But Fran is a still a child, you pedophile!

“Hmph.” Fran landed a beautiful jab right into his abdomen.

The guildmaster groaned. “But why...?” he asked.

“Receptionist said: ‘If our guildmaster says somethin’ stupid just smack ‘im.’”

“Damn him... ugh that hurt.”

“Hurry up. Tell way to get to capital.”

“Fine...”

And so we got the letter and managed to extract detailed directions to the capital from the guildmaster. It was pretty much just a straight line down the highway with only one branch somewhere in the middle. We had to turn right there then just follow the road. Information in hand, we exited the guild and made our way out of town to a place suitable for departure.

“Alright let’s do this!”

“Urushi, do best.”

“Woof!”

Fran mounted Urushi.

"Fly, Urushi! Fly!" I commanded.

"Woof woof!"

Urushi accelerated into a full run. His top speed was so fast we might even reach the capital in a single day.

"Aww hell yeah! YAHOOOOOOOOOO~!"

"Yahoo!"

"Woof woof!"

Urushi's clearly having fun since it's his first time running without hindrances in quite some time. Wait. Holy shit, he's still accelerating. We might arrive even earlier than I anticipated.

Chapter 272

Guendalfa

Urushi, full of spirit, raced non-stop down the highway connecting Roserraccoon and Vestia. After a mere eight hours of travel, we spotted the capital city looming in the horizon. This was the first time I had travelled to any capital city since reincarnating as a sword, so I was absolutely stunned by the sight. Barbara was the largest city I'd been to so far and it *paled* in comparison to Vestia. It was night time, so the whole city was illuminated by torchlight and magical fire. The flickering lights dancing on the massive 20 meter high ramparts were magnificent to behold. The royal castle could be seen standing tall over the walls and towering over the city. Its spire was easily the tallest building I had seen yet, easily visible even from a distance.

"You think they'll let us in at this time of night?"

"Nnn... Don't mind camping out."

"Yeah but I'd rather we don't. Let's just keep that in mind as a backup plan."

Some cities closed their gates after dark as a preventive measure against thieves and monsters. I wasn't sure if the capital was one of them. As we approached, we thankfully found that the gates were still open. Merchants and adventurers were lined up outside the gate in an orderly fashion. There appeared to be some formal procedures that must be taken care of before being allowed to enter. As expected of a capital city, the security was much tighter.

We joined a line that was around twenty people long with Urushi once again in his smaller form. People were already nervous because it was night time and we didn't want to exacerbate that by having a giant wolf suddenly appear in front of them.

I wanted to casually join the line without drawing any attention but apparently Fran stands out a bit too much for that. We're getting a lot of stares.

It seemed people were surprised to see a girl her age travelling with only a wolf by her side. Even more so that she was a black catkin, which was supposed to be the weakest of the beastkin tribes. Those that curiously observed her would realize that she had

evolved, which caused them to be taken aback.

“Huh, wha?”

“Are my eyes actually working?”

“No way! It’s her, the...”

“Dude, it’s the Black Lightning Princess.”

“Black Lightning Princess? Who’s that?”

The merchants and adventurers around us whispered in hushed voices. But since we’re already used to it, Fran, Urushi, and I paid no heed to it. After waiting in line for a few minutes, we were approached by three catkin.

“Umm... sorry to bother you. Are you perhaps the Black Lightning Princess?”

“Nn?”

“We call ourselves The Six Whiskers. We’re a party of catkin. We’re huge fans of you and your accomplishments. ”

The speaker was a young red catkin. Standing behind him were his companions, another red catkin who looked to be in his twenties and an older blue catkin likely in his thirties or forties.

“Dang... She really did evolve.”

“Looks like those rumors were true.”

The two whispered to one another. I was on guard against the blue catkin. I expected him to try badmouthing Fran, but he did nothing of the sort. If anything, his face showed only a look of admiration.

Huh, I’m surprised to see a blue catkin that isn’t a scumbag. Though, I probably shouldn’t be, given the Beast Lord’s black catkin-related reforms. [1]

In the end, the Six Whiskers didn’t have any particular business with Fran besides wanting to greet her. They were mostly interested in her because she evolved. At first,

I got a little nervous over questions that might expose the exploit we used to evolve her, but thankfully that didn't come up. Our discussions did however inform them about the conditions needed for black catkin to evolve. We explained to them that black catkin needed to either slay a thousand Evil Beings or defeat an A ranked one in single combat to evolve. It was good way to kill some time while waiting in line.

As more people started to approach us, a huge figure suddenly cut in through the crowd. The man stood two meters tall and was emanating a clear aura of hostility.

"Hey you," he said. "Are you the brat they call the 'Black Lightning Princess'?"

"Nn? Mhm."

"Gwahaha! My shitty uncle must be losing it if he even lost to a brat like you!"

I was filled with an unpleasant feeling when he burst into laughter. I appraised him and saw that he was a white rhinokin, not yet evolved. His name was Guendalfa. Given his race and the similarity of the names, I could only think of one acquaintance that he could possibly be related to: Goldalfa, the white rhinokin and Beast Lord's guard that fought Fran in the tournament at Ulmutt and lost.

"Hey Fran. I think this guy's related to Goldalfa."

"Goldalfa's acquaintance?" she said.

"Hah!" he snorted. "A little brat is addressing you without a title. Look how far you've fallen." He pointed to his chest. "I am Guendalfa. The one you speak of, Goldalfa, is a coward. As much as I hate to admit it, he's my father's older brother."

"Coward?"

Fran's face twitched in annoyance. Goldalfa was a warrior Fran came to respect through fierce battle. She did not like some condescending little shit disrespecting him.

"He's a fucking coward," said Guendalfa. "He threw away his position of patriarch of our clan just to become the Beast Lord's little bitch."

"Not coward. Strong, brave warrior!"

“Strong? After losing to someone as fucking puny as you? What a joke. How about I kick your little ass and prove how much of a pussy he really is?”

“You’re free to take him down but be mindful of our surroundings.” I tried to calm Fran down. *“We don’t want to be refused entry because we caused a scene.”*

“Nn. Change locations.” said Fran.

“Haaaaaaah?” he sneered. “Why? You scared? Come at me, brat!”

“Don’t wanna cause a scene.”

“Stuff your bitch-ass mouth and just fucking do it!”

Fran did not respond.

“Hey Fran. Calm down a bit. Rather, you’re totally ready to go at it aren’t you!?”

“No problem. Instant victory.”

Welp we’ve passed the point of no return.

The crowd began to shout.

“Don’t worry Black Lightning Princess!”

“We’ll testify that he started it!”

“Go kick his ass!”

Oi! Peanut Gallery! Don’t encourage her dammit!

I quickly used Stonewall to enclose Guendalfa and Fran to block them from the surroundings.

“Take this. Awakening. Brilliant Lightning Rush. Serious Punch.”

“Guboh-!” Fran’s lightning straight landed square on Guendalfa’s chest.

“-GWUAAAAHHHHHHHHHHH!”

ONE PUNCH FRAN!

Guendalfa was sent flying, crashing straight through the stonewall I erected. His armor was completely caved in and blood was flying from his mouth.

Fran shook her wrist.

“Hmph. So weak for talking so big?”

[1] For those that don't remember. The beast lord's reforms fought back against black catkin slavery and effectively ran a lot of blue catkin out of their original line of work. Master is stating that fewer of them are criminals because they had to pick up more respectable jobs.

Chapter 273

Reasons

"You, weak," said Fran.

Guendalfa did not reply

"So I don't think he can respond very well while unconscious..."

"That punch? Goldalfa would barely feel."

"Well, yeah. Goldalfa was almost immortal. Not a fair comparison."

So what the hell are we supposed to do with a knocked out rhinokin anyway...?

Fran wasn't satisfied and was glaring terribly at Guendalfa.

"Get up."

She kicked him, but the only response she got was an unconscious groan. The rhinokin showed no sign of waking, so she kicked him again and again. A guard came out of the station and approached us.

"Okay okay, that's enough, everyone break it up," he said.

"Hmph," said Fran, giving one last kick.

"Oh man though. Hell of a way to knock him out in one hit!"

Oh shit! We may have gone way too far. I hope they'll still let us in.

The guard poured a generous amount of recovery potion on Guendalfa's body and spoke to Fran.

"Sooo, can you let him go now? I know he was being an ass, but I don't think he deserves to be killed."

Huh? So we're not in trouble at all? Wait. If he knew he was being a little shit, this means that he saw the confrontation leading up to the fight. Why didn't he stop us?

"Didn't stop, why?" asked Fran.

"To be honest, he had it coming and I wanted to see someone beat the crap out of him," said the guard. "I already knew how strong you were, so I thought you would be the perfect person for the job."

"Nn. Easy," Fran boasted.

Oh god dammit Fran. Don't go tooting your god damn horn just 'cause he praised your ability to beat up some random grunt.

"I used to know Goldalfa back in the day," said the guard. "He really saved my ass when I was starting up myself. I really looked up to him. Guen too. He was really attached to his uncle back in they day. He would go on and on about how he was going to do everything to help ol' Gold out once he became the family Patriarch."

Goldalfa as some sort of patriarch? Yeah, I could see that. The guy's mad strong, so I could totally see him pulling it off.

"Goldalfa became the Beast Lord's guard and renounced his position before it was even passed to him," continued the guard, "Guen saw that as betraying expectations. The position went to Guen's father instead. And as of recent, Guen's started channeling his emotions into surpassing his uncle."

So that's why he challenged Fran. If he could beat Fran, who beat Goldalfa, then the implication is that he would be stronger than Goldalfa. He's oversimplifying it and kind of wrong, but I can at least see where he's coming from.

"Sorry about him," said the guard. "I'll make sure to tell him off. I'm not sure if this is enough to make up for this, but if you need any help just call me. I'll do whatever I can. You have my word."

The guard bowed, then effortlessly picked up Guendalfa with one hand and slung him over his shoulder. I was shocked because the guard was a scrawny man and Guendalfa was no lightweight. After a quick appraisal I saw that the guard was a high leveled oxkin on the verge of evolving.

Not bad for a city guard.

He was apparently going to throw Guendalfa into the slammer for a bit so he could cool his head.

“At this point I think we should just forgive him. It’s not like dealing with him really cost us anything, after all.”

“Nn. Good exercise.”

After that we managed to enter the capital without further incident. We got the location of the Adventurers’ Guild from a guard when passing through the gate, so we didn’t have to stop and look for it en route. Passing through the city had once again demonstrated to us the sheer amount of respect with which beastkin treated those that had evolved. Not a single beastkin adventurer messed with us on our way to the guild, and all the non-beastkin that seemed to want to were quickly shut down by their buddies. Guendalfa had been the only odd one out.

Vestia was an enormous city, so we expected the guild to be scaled up proportionally. But upon reaching it, we found that it was disappointingly only about the same size as the guilds in Roserraccoon and Argentlapn. Fran entered the guild.

“Good evening,” she said.

“Welcome,” replied the receptionist. “How can I hel- ahh. Would you happen to be Fran?”

“Nn. Know me?”

“Yes! All of us guild staff in the beastkin country know you. The staff from the Argentlapn branch sent out a message from a magic communicator informing the other branches of your arrival.”

Wait, there’s such an item for long distance communication? That’s probably how the guildmaster in Roserraccoon quickly received the info on the assassin I nabbed. Thinking about it, It only makes sense for every branch to have such a device. But then, why would they need to have us deliver a letter if they have something that convenient? I thought they gave us this letter because they had no other way to send messages over long distances. Then again, Dias did mention that he talked to other guildmasters around the time of the tournament. At this point I don’t know what to make of the situation so let’s just hand over the letter.

“This. From Roseraccoon’s guildmaster,” said Fran.

“A letter?” The receptionist received the envelope. “Let’s see. Hmm... I see. There’s no mistake. Please wait a moment.”

After examining the seal on the letter, the receptionist got up and hurried to an office in the back. After a couple minutes of waiting, she came back, brought us around the counter, and took us to the back.

“Guildmaster, I have brought her,” said the receptionist.

“Good work. Please return to your post,” said the voice of an old man.

“Understood.”

We entered the office and saw an old man with a crooked back, a set of white fox ears, and a white tail.

Normally, I’d get all excited upon encountering someone with real fox ears and a fluffy tail, but an old man...? Yeah, no.

“I am Melrosse,” he said. “Master of the Vestia’s Adventurers’ Guild.”

“C ranked adventurer, Fran.”

“Hohoho I see. You are even more powerful than the rumors suggest. Indeed very reliable.”

My first impression was that he was just a kind old man. But his eyes carried a very sharp glint as they evaluated Fran.

There’s more to him than he gives off. We can’t underestimate him.

Chapter 274

Of Letters and Items

Melrosse opened the letter and read it carefully.

“I see... Well done, Black Lightning Princess! We will hereby move to immediately support the princess.”

So the letter really was about guarding the princess. But again, why use a letter when they have magical long distance communicators?

“Why letter?” asked Fran telepathically.

“Good question,” I replied.

“Nn. Faster to use item.”

It seemed Fran and I were wondering the same thing.

“You were of great help,” said Melrosse.

“Nn...”

“Ho? What is it young one? Your face clearly shows unvoiced dissatisfaction.”

What!? How did he know that?

It really bothered me that he had accurately interpreted Fran’s expression. Fran was never the type of person to wear her emotions and that was true even now. The change in her expression was so subtle that I’d assumed I was the only one capable of noticing it. I unconsciously appraised him before I could stop myself. Since I’d already gone ahead and done it, I decided I might as well check his skills and confirmed that he didn’t have anything that would allow him to read her mind.

“Could tell, how?” asked Fran.

“Ho. When you have lived as long as I have you can observe what other people often miss.”

Seriously? Just pure wisdom from age? What the hell!.

“...Can use item. Why send letter?” asked Fran.

“Hoho, so it was the letter that was bothering you. There is a significant reason why we chose to use that method in particular. Would you like me to explain it?”

“Nn.”

“Very well.”

The guildmaster held the letter out to Fran.

“Okay to read?” she asked.

“Indeed.”

Fran and I took a look at the contents. The letter described how a Basharian assassin was caught in the beastkin country and that the evident danger was reason to provide the princess with additional guards. It didn’t seem like anything out of the ordinary save the code-like numbers that followed the rest of the letter’s content. I glanced at Melrose and found him carefully observing Fran.

“Weird numbers? Meaning?” asked Fran.

“They contain information pertaining to the princess’ destination,” he said. “We encrypt the information for security reasons.”

The guildmaster went on to explain why they used a letter and not the long distance communication tool. It turned out the Basharians also had similar tools, and the concern was that they could eavesdrop on conversations in the beastkin country. Information on assassinations and invasion plans had apparently been compromised in the past. If that was the case, I could see why they would rely on a physical letter for top secret information.

“If we knew the exact methods they used to eavesdrop on us we could deploy countermeasures,” he frowned.

“Not known?” asked Fran.

“Yes, their methods are unknown to us. That is the only reason we fall back on more traditional methods of communication, like letters. Strong couriers like you are essential to the swift relay of information.”

I was using Principle of Falsehood during the entire conversation. All the parts that the guildmaster said about Bashar was true. But the very last part about it being the *only* reason was a lie. It could be that simply an organization as large as the guild would naturally have one or two secrets. But I couldn't help but feel bothered that we were used for more than just confidential communication...

I hope we weren't used for something malicious.

I discussed my suspicions with Fran.

“Nn. Will ask discreetly,” she said.

“Yeah, let's try not to make an enemy of the guild. If he doesn't talk then just drop the matter.”

“Nn.”

Fran turned to the guildmaster.

“What are other reasons?”

Oi! What's with that straight-ball question!? There's nothing discreet about that!

“Hmm?” said Melrosse.

“If need speed, then send letter by bird,” said Fran. “Still hiding something. Wanted me to deliver. Why?”

“Hm. You are certainly right that a messenger bird would be quicker, or some other method of communication too. But we still have our reasons.”

“Which are?”

“Not telling. This information is not privy to a C ranker.”

Welp we just got stonewalled by the bureaucracy. Can't do anything about that.

"Don't glare at me like that," he said. "I'll still tell you what I can. You see, that letter was intended to verify whether or not our country's guilds could trust you."

"Some sort of test?" asked Fran.

"No comment. But just like how you are doubting me right now, we were also doubting you since you came to our country. You have yet to do anything to earn our trust."

And so they asked us to deliver a top secret letter? I don't know how it proves our trustworthiness, but I'm glad we actually did our job properly and refrained from breaking the seal on the envelope. We were accustomed to being welcomed with open arms in the beastkin country simply because Fran evolved. Most of the people we met had assumed that Fran was someone that would help them in their time of need. But in reality, not all beastkin would necessarily ally themselves with the beastkin country. As far as the guild was concerned, we'd started off on the list of those that couldn't be trusted, but with this task under our belts we were under far less scrutiny.

"Got it," said Fran.

"Hoh. So are you satisfied with this explanation?" he asked.

"For now."

"Very good. We are grateful for the work you have done for us, so we shall give you a suitable reward."

"Nn. Got it."

We exited the guildmaster's room and headed to the counter where we received our reward. By the time we headed to an inn recommended by the Adventurers' Guild it was well into the night. Thankfully the inn had a receptionist posted 24 hours a day. It was quite suitable for adventurers who did not have consistent schedules and would often request lodging and random times at night...

When we got to our room Fran jumped headfirst into the bed.

"At least take off your cloak."

“Uuu...”

“I’ll cast purification on you and clean you up.”

“Nmmm”

“Come on. Get into the covers too, okay?”

“Mmph.”

I tucked Fran, who was half asleep, into bed using telekinesis.

“Goodnight.”

“Nn.”

Fran was out within three seconds.

Children do need their sleep after all.

Tomorrow’s the day we finally visit the castle. I was a bit concerned about getting around at first, but luckily the guildmaster said that he would provide us with a guide. Hopefully we’ll finally get to meet Kiara, the older catkin who was instrumental towards Fran’s growth. I wonder what kind of person she is. Hopefully someone that will spoil Fran like a child.



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